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EAGLE VS. BATS:
ALAN GRANT
THE DREDD HEAD
GOES BATTY

FROM LOBO TO HELL:
A DEMONIC DIALOG WITH
VAL SEMEIKS

#101

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

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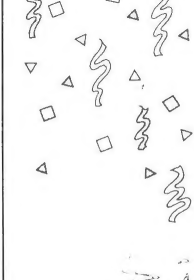

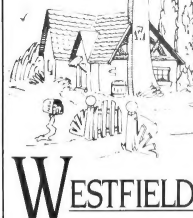

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SIMON BISLEY
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UP FRONT

"WHEN THE COWS CAME HOME . . ."

by Ed Hannigan and David Anthony Kraft

You've read many stories where a spaceship came down to Earth, and it turned out to be the ancient Egyptians — or it was Jehovah, Jesus, the ancient gods, Satan, or the angels above that came to spread benevolence upon mankind or wreak vengeance and destroy us all.

In some of these stories it was weird alien beasts that came down to do good things for us, but it turned out at the end of the story that they wanted to eat us — or in some cases they just wanted to destroy us outright, when they came down.

But when the spaceships actually flew over Washington and landed on the White House lawn, it turned out that instead of any of the above, god-like beings, that they were actually cows.

They were the cows that we'd sent out to pasture long ago. They were just sent out to graze and get fattened — now they were coming back for the milking and the slaughter. What with all the troubles and the recession, we had just forgotten all about them.

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"Dredd has Batman in custody, where he intends to keep

ALAN GRANT

In COMICS INTERVIEW #99, Alan Grant discussed his work as a scripter of DC's LOBO series. Now, here in #101, he talks about another of his forthcoming collaborations with artist Simon Bisley, JUDGMENT ON GOTHAM, the graphic novel in which Batman encounters perhaps Britain's most famous comic-book character, Judge Dredd. Grant is the current writer of DC's BATMAN, and he and his frequent partner John Wagner have been the principal writers on JUDGE DREDD for many years. Wagner is co-writing the Batman-Dredd book with Grant.

Those of you who read COMICS INTERVIEW #99 will recall that my interviews with Grant and Bisley had to be redone due to a malfunctioning tape recorder; hence, the several references throughout the interview below to "what we were saying yesterday."

PETER SANDERSON: *You were saying yesterday that the Batman-Judge Dredd team-up was first suggested to you and John Wagner a number of years ago, and that Wagner turned it down because he didn't like superheroes. You also said that, at the time, DC intended the team-up as an attempt to boost Batman's popularity.*

ALAN GRANT: That's the way I heard it, anyway. I was told Batman's popularity was at such a low point that they wanted any publicity at all, they wanted any gimmick to boost sales. **Alan Moore** and **Brian Bolland** were then, to the best of my knowledge, selected to do it. Nobody mentioned the project again to **John Wagner** or me after that. I met **Alan Moore** personally and passed along to him the fact that we weren't very happy at the thought of him doing Judge Dredd — particularly when the writers perceive characters that they've created being used by the publisher, not so much without their consent but without any consultation whatsoever. Anyway, so far as I know, because of that I believe what he and Brian ended up with instead was THE KILLING JOKE — which from their point of view can't have been a bad thing, because it's still in print and sold a lot of copies over the years.

PETER: *Next Dredd-Batman was offered to Alan Davis?*

ALAN: It was offered to **Alan Davis** with **Paul Neary** as his inker. He did draw a Judge Dredd story which featured a Batman-like character, which was written especially for him, to give him a sort of taste for the actual team-up book — and he did a really good job of it for 2000 AD. But I believe he wasn't able to obtain as advantageous a percentage for himself and Paul on the team-up as he would have got from his dealings with Marvel. So the way I understand that is he went off to do EXCALIBUR, instead. Again, you can't say that was a bad move.

PETER: *And then it was again offered to you and John Wagner after the BATMAN movie came out?*

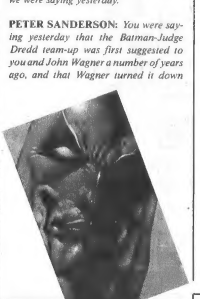
ALAN: That's right. John and I came up with this idea for it which involved a monstrous creature, which wasn't too much to DC's or Fleetway's liking. And we also tried to play it more straightforward, with Judge Dredd as the blind, obedient servant of the law and Batman as the caring vigilante — the antithesis, really, of Judge Dredd. And we found that these stories sucked, actually, not to put too fine a point on it. It came out flat and boring.

PETER: *It was overly serious?*

ALAN: It was. We played up the horror angle too much. We played up the humor angle far too little. We had spent considerable time on this, and didn't want to junk it, so we said, "Okay, let's go with it." We sent copies of the proposal off to Fleetway and to **Denny O'Neil** at DC. Both parties passed it and told us to get started. It was on the night that we actually started to write it; we sat down and looked at each other — we never really liked this one. Let's see if we can come up with something that makes us happy while we're writing it, that gives us a laugh, that entertains us.

We toyed around with a few villains. We ended up with Judge Death, who's Judge Dredd's personal nemesis; Mean Machine Angel, who's had a steel plate surgically implanted in his head with a dial on it which, when it reads two, he's downright nasty, and when it reads four, he goes into a head-to-head frenzy. His preferred method of combat is the head butt. On the Gotham side we threw in the Scarecrow.

Also from Mega-City One we threw in Judge Anderson, who's a female psi-judge, because she's a much better partner for Batman than Judge Dredd. Judge Dredd is too much of an old



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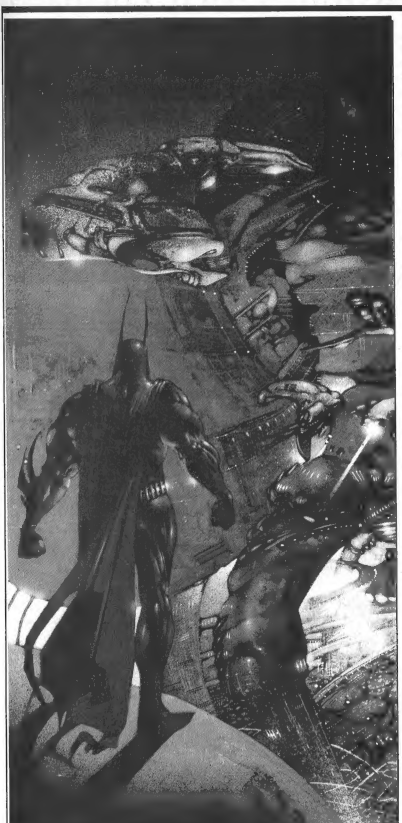
him for the next 20 years on various vigilante charges."



stickler. I don't know if the word "stickler" means anything much in America. Do you know what the word "curmudgeon" means?

PETER: *Yes.*

ALAN: Yeah, well, that's kind of what Judge Dredd's like. He's a bit of an old curmudgeon.

PETER: *Also rather asexual.*

ALAN: Yeah, and we got some sparks going between Anderson and Batman. They were quite impressed with each other.

PETER: *That's interesting, since it's been said that women don't have much of a role to play in Batman's life.*

ALAN: It's not been proposed or anything, but even if we did a follow-up, I'm not sure how far along we would follow the spark between them, because — and I think **Denny O'Neil** would agree with this — it's been pretty well stated that Ra's Al Ghul's daughter Talia is the only girl with whom Batman could fall in love. Although there's obviously sparks between Batman and Catwoman, it's always really been Talia who's been sort of the lost potential love of his life, and I wouldn't want to go against that. I'm quite happy without getting any sort of romantic involvement between Batman and Judge Anderson. Anderson's a real flirty kind of person.

PETER: *This provides another interesting contrast between Dredd and Batman. It humanizes Batman because he's able to get along with her better.*

ALAN: Yeah, exactly. Anderson actually helps Batman. Dredd has Batman in custody, where he intends to keep him for the next twenty years on various vigilante charges. And it's only after Anderson reads Batman's mind that she realizes the truth of what's going on. And she helps Batman to escape from justice. So instead of Batman teaming up with Judge Dredd, we have Judge Dredd pursuing Batman and Judge Anderson together.

PETER: *So a bond is never formed between Dredd and Batman? Do they continue to be on opposite sides throughout the story?*

ALAN: The bond that they form between them is a bond of intense mutual hatred.

PETER: *So they don't see any similarities between themselves that would lend themselves to an alliance.*

ALAN: No, they don't. Judge Dredd, once he has Batman in custody, conducts a particularly brutal interrogation of Batman, and Batman is so appalled at Dredd's fascist outlook that he busts the

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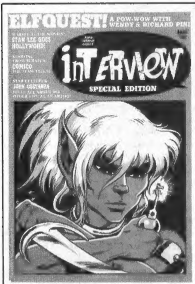

ELFQUEST. A pow-wow with the Pinis on Elfquest, the creation of an elfin world. John Costanza, letterer, tells all of being an artist. Stan Lee goes Hollywood, and the beginning of a legend now the Comico bunch, on their dreams and schemes for the future. Pini cover.

JLA-AVENGERS. George Perez and Roy Thomas tell all about a project that never saw print. Pencils never printed art, only available here! Also John Workman on Heavy Metal, Berke Breathed on Bloom County, Mike Friedrich on the biz end. Perez cover.

JUDGE DREDD VS BATMAN. Brian Bolland spills the beans on this project, first time round. Am Sabus saddles Neil the Horse. Don and Maggie Thompson give an inside view of the Comics Buyer's Guide. Bolland cover.

ROBOTECH. Carl Macek & Neil Vokes - from TV to comics - tell why Robotech's a hit. Phil Foglio - Hugo Award winning Sci-Fi artist mumbles about Myth-Adventures, and Cat Yronwode on art for art sake and comics for comics sake. More. Vokes & Rankin cover.

ELEKTRA. The evolution of Elektra. Frank Miller on ELEKTRA LIVES AGAIN and the DAREDEVIL graphic novel to come, "a huge, expansive, embroidered origin story, much like BATMAN: YEAR ONE." Bill Sienkiewicz on ELEKTRA: ASSASSIN. More. Sienkiewicz cover.

DARK KNIGHT. Frank Miller expounds on his magnum opus. Fred Finger, on his father, Bill. Bob Kane, on the last 50 yrs since Bat birth. Jerry Robinson, on past memories. Burt Ward on the trouble with tights, and George Roussos on the early days. Miller cover.

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"We picked Judge Death — he is a very visual character."

straps that bind him in a fit of anti-fascist rage and gives Dredd a bit of a good pummeling.

PETER: *In a past interview, you said that you had trouble with your Dredd stories in that you often tried to present him from a negative point of view, and you weren't sure it always came across.*

ALAN: Yeah.

PETER: *It seems to me from the way you're describing this story that Dredd is going to look pretty bad compared to Batman.*

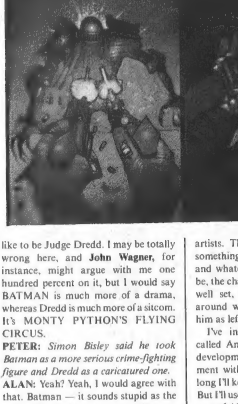
ALAN: Yeah, he is. But that's OK because that's the kind of guy he is. There are two ways of playing Judge Dredd: One is to play him as a total anti-hero; the other way he can be played is as a hero. He does get into heroic situations and does heroic things. He saves kids from fires; he'll endanger himself to save an innocent citizen. But at the same time, in the furtherance of the law, he will stoop to anything. He will, for instance, lie. Batman, I don't think, would ever lie for justice. Batman's first allegiance would be to the truth. The two really are incompatible. It's possible to play Dredd so that he's more compatible with Batman, but when Dredd's played that way, as far as I'm concerned, he becomes like any other hero, like anybody — Batman, Punisher, Spider-Man, Grodd the Gorilla, anybody you care to mention can rescue kids from fires and stop muggings and stuff like that. It's only when Dredd is treating the people that he's meant to be protecting as harshly as the people from whom he's protecting them that the essence of Dredd comes into play. A Dredd story's never really complete unless he arrests the victim as well as the perpetrator of the crime.

PETER: *So you have the paradox of Batman the vigilante having a stronger and purer commitment to morality than Dredd, the member of the establishment.*

ALAN: Yeah. Well, Dredd's establishment is a very immoral establishment. The judges keep themselves in power. They were elected, but I think that was fifty years ago. They're self-perpetuating.

PETER: *Batman is self-elected.*

ALAN: Yeah, but I think that Batman had a very valid reason for it. I'm not a typical comic-book reader, and I'm not a kid any longer — well, not really — but when I read BATMAN comics I always wanted to be Batman, and I'm sure the same goes for most readers. You read a BATMAN comic and you empathize with the character so completely that you wanted to be Batman. I have never read a Judge Dredd story where I felt I'd really



like to be Judge Dredd. I may be totally wrong here, and **John Wagner,** for instance, might argue with me one hundred percent on it, but I would say BATMAN is much more of a drama, whereas Dredd is much more of a sitcom. It's MONTY PYTHON'S FLYING CIRCUS.

PETER: *Simon Bisley said he took Batman as a more serious crime-fighting figure and Dredd as a caricatured one.*

ALAN: Yeah? Yeah, I would agree with that. Batman — it sounds stupid as the writer of both characters to say this — to me Batman is real, could be real, and could have been real in any time in man's history, whereas Judge Dredd couldn't ever be real. Judge Dredd will always be a comic character.

PETER: *You said yesterday that at various times in the past Batman has been accused of being a fascistic character. But by pitting him against Judge Dredd, you're examining the question of how fascistic Batman is. You're drawing the line between him and this other character. And you said you regarded Batman as a sort of liberal vigilante?*

ALAN: Yeah, I do. I see Batman as having very strong left-wing leanings and sympathies. And I don't think I can do this — because it's against the American establishment, really — but I would dearly love to do Batman stories where Batman could end up defaming the American flag. The reason I don't do it is that I would be using it as a mouthpiece for my own views. And though I do that to a certain extent in BATMAN, Batman is actually much more than that. I owe something to fifty years of Batman fans. Batman stories, all the other writers and artists. They have made Batman into something that is intrinsically American, and whatever my personal views might be, the character of the Batman is pretty well set, and I don't want to screw around with that. So I couldn't make him as left-wing as I'd like him to be.

I've introduced a young character called Anarky, and I aim to follow his development, to parallel his development with Robin's. It depends on how long I'll keep on writing the book, that is. But I'll use the character of Anarky to say an awful lot of the things that I'd actually like Batman to say, but which are difficult for Batman to say.

PETER: *BATMAN: YEAR ONE struck me as presenting Batman as very much a Robin Hood figure taking on the forces of government in Gotham.*

ALAN: Well, I personally think BATMAN: YEAR ONE is the best Batman story I've ever read. I mean, I've not read all the Batman stories, obviously. But of the ones that I've read, I'd say that BATMAN: YEAR ONE is definitely the best. It's better than THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS, by far.

PETER: *What are the reasons you picked the specific villains you did for the Batman-Dredd book?*

ALAN: We picked Judge Death because Judge Death is a very, very visual character. He has almost as strong a following on this side of the Atlantic as Dredd has. We picked the Mean Machine because he's simple, he's brutal, and he has a deadly sense of humor. Scarecrow, because he's really in my mind the spookiest of the Batman villains, and we needed a villain who could team up with Judge Death. And

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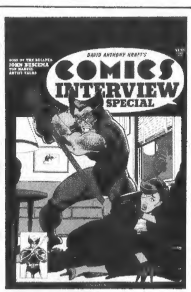

WOLVERINE. Marvel's mutant mastermind, Bob Harras on launching Logan's solo series. John Buscema on drawing savage superheroes. Plus Al Williamson, illustrator extraordinaire. Original Buscema/Janson WOLVERINE cover never printed on any of Marvel's books.

LONE WOLF. Frank Miller speaks his mind. Kazuo Koike and Goseki Kojima, creators of a Japanese legend, in a talk from Tokyo. Plus First Comics crew Rick Obadiah, Kurt Goldzung, Alex Wald, Paul Guinan, Willie Schubert and Rick Oliver. Kojima cover.

ALIENS. Mark Nelson and Mark Verheiden point out the positive and negative problems of dealing with Aliens. Mike Richardson and Randy Stradley on directing a Dark Horse, and maturing freelance talent. Nelson cover.

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"British comics are turned out on a weekly basis."

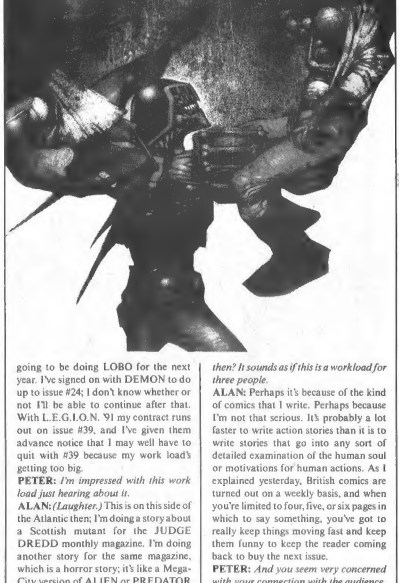
these two went together. Like, we couldn't team up the Penguin with Judge Death, for instance. It wouldn't have worked. We couldn't have used the Catwoman. None of them are in the same sort of league. Even the Joker couldn't have teamed up with Judge Death, I think. But the Scarecrow, because of fear and terror, was the perfect one to choose for. And the two of them actually work really well together. They make a great team.

PETER: *You said yesterday that Judge Death performs in a rock concert by the end of the story. You also said you wanted a story with laughs in it. Does this all mean that you see an element of comedy — even an element of camp — as necessary to the costumed hero action-adventure story, whether it's Batman or Dredd or anyone else?*

ALAN: No, I don't necessarily see it with Batman. I can write Batman stories which I think — whether or not they *are* is up to the readers — are a punching human drama — they're real. It's not necessarily an intrinsic part of the superhero world for me. After quite a lot of experience writing for British comics — non-humor stories — I long ago realized that unless a story has some sort of little humorous element in it, I'm very likely to become bored with it very quickly. I think I was saying this last night with respect to the Punisher, although I don't mean any disrespect to the character of the Punisher. He's a good character; he's been phenomenally popular. But at the same time there's absolutely no humor in him. When **John Wagner** and I sit down and write something that we enjoy writing, like the Batman-Dredd team-up, for instance, it's a joy. It's not like working; it's like sitting rapping and having a good time for three or four hours with somebody you know really well. It's fun. But sitting down to do our PUNISHER graphic novel was like going to do your job at a factory or an office, because you weren't going to laugh. There was no humor in it; it was deadly serious, and because of that, we were worried that we were making the story dull. I'm assured by Marvel that we haven't made the story dull; they're very happy with it. But at the same time it's not an experience that John and I would care to run through again and write another one.

PETER: *What are your other projects for the future. You're continuing to write BATMAN?*

ALAN: Yeah, I've just signed a contract to write another year of BATMAN. I'm going to be doing LOBO for the next year. I've signed on with DEMON to do up to issue #24; I don't know whether or not I'll be able to continue after that. With L.E.G.I.O.N. '91 my contract runs out on issue #39, and I've given them advance notice that I may well have to quit with #39 because my work load's getting too big.



PETER: *I'm impressed with this work load just hearing about it.*

ALAN: *(Laughter.)* This is on this side of the Atlantic then; I'm doing a story about a Scottish mutant for the JUDGE DREDD monthly magazine. I'm doing another story for the same magazine, which is a horror story; it's like a Mega-City version of ALIEN or PREDATOR or something like that. For the British comic TOXIC I'm doing a story called "Macabre." This is a new British comic; it's just been released. For the same comic I'm doing a story called "The Garbage Man," which is a superhero spoof about a guy who gets turned into a garbage man.

PETER: *A man made of garbage?*

ALAN: Exactly

PETER: *A Garbage-Thing.*

ALAN: Yeah. He constantly changes and warps and shifts.

PETER: *So how many of you are there, then? It sounds as if this is a workload for three people.*

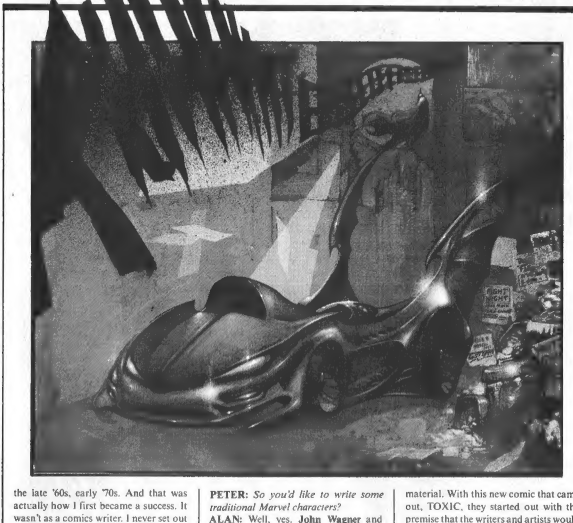
ALAN: Perhaps it's because of the kind of comics that I write. Perhaps because I'm not that serious. It's probably a lot faster to write action stories than it is to write stories that go into any sort of detailed examination of the human soul or motivations for human actions. As I explained yesterday, British comics are turned out on a weekly basis, and when you're limited to four, five, or six pages in which to say something, you've got to really keep things moving fast and keep them funny to keep the reader coming back to buy the next issue.

PETER: *And you seem very concerned with your connection with the audience.*

ALAN: Well, if I like what I've written, I don't care if anybody else likes it or not — although it gives me great joy if people send me letters saying that a particular story made them cry, for instance. I really like getting letters from people who say that my stories made them cry.

Long before I got into comics, I was a successful romantic fiction writer. I worked as a freelancer on a variety of magazines. You must have them in the States as well: magazines with titles like TRUE CONFESSIONS. There used to be a whole line of them in this country in

"People here tend to look toward creator-owned material."



the late '60s, early '70s. And that was actually how I first became a success. It wasn't as a comics writer. I never set out to be a comics writer; I just wanted to be a writer. I spent years writing stories with titles like "My Boyfriend was a Hell's Angel," and "I Stole to Get an Abortion." All of them were written under female pseudonyms, obviously *(Laughter.)*. So all of my training is as a romantic fiction writer, not a comics writer. I suppose where I get my love of action comics is basically from Marvel Comics during my teenage years. I was an avid Marvel fan.

PETER: *This would be during the 1960s?*

ALAN: I was eleven years old when Marvel released THE FANTASTIC FOUR, Prince Namor, THE HULK, THE AVENGERS. I really was an avid collector. I knew all the BATMAN mythos. I knew Superman's story. I knew and loved the Bizarros and Green Lantern and all the rest of them. But when Marvel came out, it was like those were the comics that I had waited for. And I saved up Marvel Comics for, like, the next ten years or something.

PETER: *So you'd like to write some traditional Marvel characters?*

ALAN: Well, yes. **John Wagner** and **Simon Bisley** and I have a proposal with Marvel for a DOCTOR STRANGE painted graphic novel featuring Nightmare and Morbius the Living Vampire.

I'm also doing a project with **Bisley** and somebody you've probably never heard of, named **Tony Luke.** He majored in animation film production. You'll be seeing his name in the future because he and I have been working on other things together. We've done a limited series for Marvel called PSYCHONAUTS.

I've got two things that I'm working up as proposals for the moment for **Art Young's** Touchmark Comics (a division of Disney Comics). One of the things I'm doing for him is called NECRONOMI-CON which, again, I'm doing in conjunction with **Tony Luke,** and is about a demon-hunter, and the second one is called THE HANGED MAN.

I don't know if it's the same in the States, but people in this country tend to be looking more towards creator-owned material. With this new comic that came out, TOXIC, they started out with the premise that the writers and artists would retain copyright on all their work.

We — when I say "we," I'm usually talking about myself and **John Wagner,** because we're worked together for such a long time — we did a story for Marvel UK called "The Chronicles of Genghis Grimtoad," which you've probably never heard of. It's not exactly a kiddie story, but it's THE HOBBIT rather than LORD OF THE RINGS. And it's something we just did as a light-hearted exercise. Anyway, just this morning we got royalty checks from Marvel for sales to France and sales to Germany, which excites me greatly. Much as I enjoy working, which I do — I've spent quite a lot of my time doing it — one of the few feelings which rivals it is the feeling that you get when you get a royalty check. Something that you get for something that you've already been paid for. It's great to have people give you money for nothing, so to speak.

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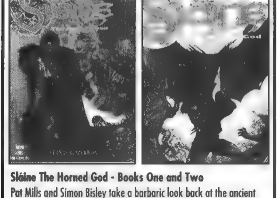

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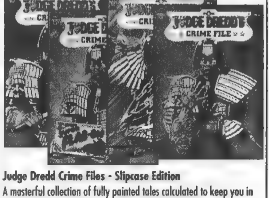

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PETER DAVID

comics **12** *interview*

It's beginning to feel like I talk to Peter David for publication almost as often as I talk to him just as a friend. This is the second of three interviews for COMICS INTERVIEW I have recently done with Peter. The first, covering his comics adaptation and novelization of the film version of THE ROCKETEER, appeared in C1#94; the third, discussing his work on the upcoming X-FACTOR, as well as INCREDIBLE HULK and STAR TREK, will follow in a few months.

By the way, many people have accused Peter of having three first names and no last one: Peter Alan David. I've always assumed he was just making up for the people like my niece, who have three last names, such as Delaney Pendleton Brown.

Without further ado, Peter David on Wolverine . . .

PATRICK DANIEL O'NEILL: *You're doing the Wolverine feature in MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS that will follow Barry Windsor-Smith's "Weapon X" story. What's the background?*

PETER DAVID: The background is that I was going to do an eight-part Wolverine story in which Wolverine encounters a guy from his past, who beat Wolverine early on in his career, so thoroughly and so badly, that Wolverine has virtually a mental block against taking the guy on. Whenever he sees him, he just starts to freeze up. It's someone that Wolverine has thought about for years and years; he's built him up in his mind as being someone who can beat the shit out of Wolverine without any trouble. Wolverine now encounters the guy again, upon returning to Madripoor and has to overcome his psychological block in order to confront him.

Originally, it was going to be a fairly straightforward, eight-part superhero-type story, with **Todd McFarlane** drawing it. Todd then got involved with the SPIDER-MAN book, so they put **Sam Kieth** on it. Sam has a dramatically different style from Todd, leaning more toward the horrific, the moody, the creepy style. I felt a story that was originally intended for Todd, now as-

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"I did a story that is Wolverine's answer to TWIN PEAKS."

signed to Sam, had to be tailored to Sam's particular strengths. I spoke to Sam about it, asking, "What would you like to draw?" He said, "I would like to draw a giant hot-dog cart in the shape of a hot dog," and a couple of other bizarre images. They were all such utterly disconnected, disjointed images that I thought, "How am I going to do a hot-dog cart in Madripoor? It doesn't make any sense."

Also, at about that time, TWIN PEAKS had started and *it* was this incredibly bizarre show. I said to myself, "I think I'll do a story that is Wolverine's answer to TWIN PEAKS. This will be one of the most bizarre and outrageous Wolverine stories anybody has ever seen." As a result, that's the story we wound up with.

Let's see if we can do a story that's so weird and filled with symbolism that it will get the fans talking, because we was A to do something that would be able to follow "Weapon X." That's exactly what we came up with. In order to make the story as bizarre as possible, I only wrote it at three in the morning. *(Laughter.)* I'd go to bed at, like, 11 o'clock at night, set my clock for 3:00 a.m., get up at 3:00 a.m., sit down at the computer and type up a Wolverine story that was virtually stream-of-consciousness That's what we wound up getting. To my shock, the story actually holds up extremely well — I would have thought it would be extremely disjointed and have virtually no connection from beginning to end. Yet it isn't. . which surprised me a great deal.

PAT: *Is it still basically a story about someone that Wolverine has a mental block against?*

PETER: Absolutely that's still the theme, the thrust of the story. But the idea is one thing and the execution is something else again. The execution I've come up with is really, completely off-the-wall.

We have a dream sequence — Wolverine is in an hallucinatory state for three parts out of the eight. There's a lengthy dream sequence in which Wolverine is remembering back to when he first met this guy — except, because it's a dream sequence and Wolverine is hallucinating, it's not an accurate depiction of the way it was. Everything is couched in symbolism: Wolverine is like **James Dean,** the guy he's intimidated by is a brutish gym teacher. They're driving these hot-dog carts — which, of course, has other meanings.

It's really just a very, very strange story that I want people to read and really think about in trying to figure out what is going on, because there are all these underlying layers for people to try to get into it. It's a very unusual and wacked out story.

PAT: *That leads to an interesting question. Is the general audience for Wolverine going to appreciate what you have put into this? What you want them to get out of it?*

PETER: Can you be more specific about what you mean by "general audience"?

PAT: *Wolverine seems to attract a lot of readers who are interested in his slashing, angry, berserker, kick-ass character. That is what they find attractive about him, that is why they read the character. I may be doing them an injustice — but I don't think so — they're not really interested in whatever psychology you as a writer might want to put in for why he is that way. They just like him because he is.*

And from another of David's scripting chores: Pencils from WOLVERINE #9, by Gene Colan.

"Wolverine was definitely un-wussy. Definitely not for

the faint-of-heart — as people are accustomed to saying."

PETER: The whole key to writing is not necessarily giving the readers what they want, but what they should have. If that's patronizing, so be it — but the fact of the matter is, if you always give the readers precisely what they want, they will very quickly become bored and go away. My feeling was, "Let's do something that's really going to try to goose them a little; make them think."

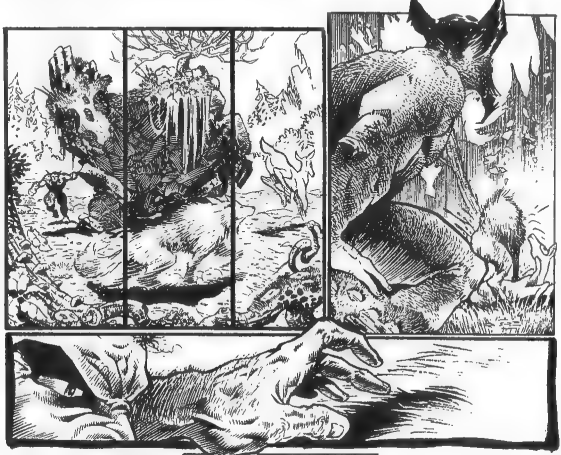
There is enough standard Wolverine action in there to keep the kiddies happy, and the climactic battle between Wolverine and the villain — whose name is Cyber — should be memorable enough. There are some sequences in there that people will be talking about for a long, long time. My feeling was if I didn't really have Wolverine cut loose in the final sequences, people would remember it as "This is the story Wolverine was real wussy in." So I had to make sure that, in the final sequences in the last two chapters, Wolverine was definitely *un*-wussy. The final battle is definitely not for the faint of heart — as people are accustomed to saying. As a matter of fact, the first version of it came back so graphic, I had to get in touch with the artist and say, "Sam, we have to tone this down just a tad or it's not getting through the Comics Code."

PAT: *On Wolverine in general, not just this particular story: When I interviewed Chris Claremont, about a year or so ago, he told me that* you *had once said — either directly to him or in an interview, I don't know which — that when you write Wolverine's dialogue you hear it in the same voice that Chris writes it in, because that's the only way you can think of Wolverine talking. Chris said that, oddly enough, when he reads your stuff — while it's good, he enjoys it — it doesn't sound* at all *like the Wolverine he writes.*

PETER: Of course not. That's always going to happen; that happens with any writer. The reason for that is that, when a writer is writing a character — particularly one that is so intensely personal as Wolverine is, I think, for Chris — when you write the character, you hear your own voice speaking the words. When I write the Hulk, I hear my voice except it's speaking with the Hulk's intonation.

When Chris is reading Wolverine as I've written him, he doesn't hear that voice because he didn't write those words. He tries to put his own voice to it and it doesn't sound right because the words didn't come from him. Therefore, the character doesn't sound correct. That's commonplace. It's exactly the way I react when I see the Hulk written by someone else. My feeling is that the surface may be there, but the nuances aren't there.

When I write Wolverine, I tend to view him a bit more primally than Chris does. When I do Wolverine, I stick to Chris's established format of captions for running narrative, for thought process, and to try to use a bit more staccato sentences, that sort of thing. However, when I do Wolverine, I treat him as much more of a primal force, whereas Chris tends to treat him as the noble samurai. I don't know from samurai. I think that other people tend to treat Wolverine as **Clint Eastwood** with claws, which I think is completely wrong. My feeling is to deal with the repressed rage — actually that's not even right. When you're dealing with



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"I see Wolverine as Tarzan of the Apes: a primal character."

Wolverine, you're almost treating him like Tarzan. Tarzan is a jungle animal, but he's got this veneer of civilization that he puts on — he becomes John Clayton, Lord Greystoke, and he seems very polished and very civil. But if you cross him, he'll rip out your throat with his teeth and not be sorry for a second, because you tried to screw with him and that's what happens to people who do that. I see Wolverine very much as Tarzan of the Apes: a very primal character and very tactile. Whenever I write Wolverine, I try to stress what he's smelling, what he's hearing, what he's feeling — because I think that's how he would be perceiving the world. He would be aware of his own blood pumping, of heart beats.

Chris, when he does Wolverine, tends to stress how he views his opponent in terms of nobility — and I tend not to.

When you're a writer, you're almost an actor. You assume a character and you do your own interpretation: You have **Mel Gibson's** version of Hamlet as opposed to **Laurence Olivier's** version. Both are equally valid . . . but they're not on at the same time. Because you have different writers handling the same characters with different viewpoints, you have different takes. When Chris says that I stick to Wolverine as *he* wrote it, that *is* what I said. What I meant is that I was staying with his delivery and the way he talks, but the motivation behind what Wolverine thinks and says differs a bit from the way Chris does it.

PAT: *What do you think of the current hints — or more than hints — that Wolverine is considerably older than we had been led to believe?*

PETER DAVID

"I like the aspects of the mystery man in Wolverine."

PETER: There have been more than hints . . . didn't they show him in World War II? Fighting side by side with Captain America?

Chris has been hinting around at that for years: that Logan has been around for ages and ages and ages. He said he wanted to do a story with Cap running into Wolverine and saying, "Sgt. Logan?" recognizing him from World War II.

I think that it makes eminent sense. If his mutant power is a healing ability, then one of the things it might be healing is cellular deterioration, which leads to aging. Therefore, it makes perfect sense that Wolverine should be fairly old — at least older than he appears. How old that is, I haven't a clue. I definitely think that if it is ever established, Chris should be the one to do it. I don't think he has any plans to — I'm just trying to second-guess him.

I hope he doesn't. I kind of like the aspects of the mystery man in Wolverine. I thought one of the nicest bits they ever did was early on — Wolverine popped his claws out of his hand for the first time out of costume. Banshee says, "I didn't know the claws were part of *you*." And Logan answers, "It's none of your business." In a subsequent issue, Wolverine speaks Japanese for the first time, and the X-Men say, "I didn't know you could speak Japanese," and again he replies, "It's none of your business."

These things give you tremendous flexibility as a writer. You can pull things out of your hat and when his companions comment on some seemingly new ability, he can just say, "I didn't bring it up because it's none of your business." I don't think Wolverine should be too spelled out because that would take away the element of what he might pull out of his hat next, that he's never spoken about because "It's none of our business."

I don't want to know too much of Wolverine's business. He should keep it to himself so he can continue to surprise us and continue to make life very convenient for writers. *(Laughter.)*

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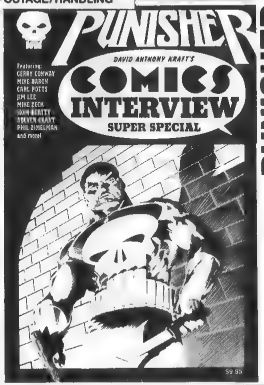

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"I can only concentrate for a very short period of time."

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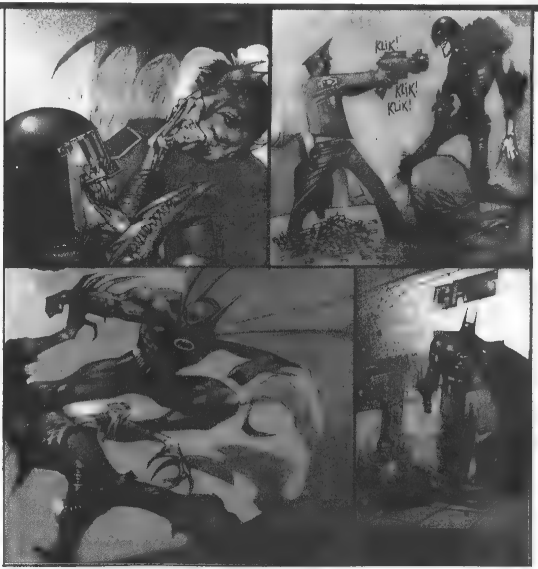


SIMON BISLEY

Dark clouds can have silver linings, and having to do an interview twice can be rewarding. By now you are familiar with the tale of my tape recorder malfunctioning during my first interviews with artist Simon Bisley and writer Alan Grant, collaborators on the forthcoming Batman-Judge Dredd book JUDGMENT ON GOTHAM (with co-writer John Wagner) and on DC's LOBO (with Keith Giffen). After the first interviews Bisley and Grant continued to think over the topics we had discussed. So in the second interview, Grant was able to expand further upon the ideas he ex-

"When I go to London, I find it claustrophobic and

pressed in the first session. Simon Bisley, on the other hand, ended up revising his opinions on various matters having to do with Batman and Judge Dredd, as you will see in the interview that follows.

PETER SANDERSON: *Last time you were talking about your fascination with Judge Death. Judge Dredd's principal nemesis, who is one of the villains in the Batman/Judge Dredd book.*

SIMON BISLEY: That's right. We talked about his struggle to live, even in death. He's kind of masquerading as life. He takes other people's lives almost because they live, you know, and he wants to take that away from them.

PETER: *That's one of the reasons you are intrigued by Judge Death?*

SIMON: Mmm. No, I don't think I'm particularly intrigued by Judge Death. I just think I was intrigued by death in general. *(Laughter.)*

PETER: *Well, you said that was part of the reason you were interested in doing*

an unfriendly place—New York is 50 times bigger."

Judge Death in this story.

SIMON: Yeah, that's right. That's part of the reason, because I'm fascinated with death. The whole idea that we live and then we just die, simple as that. I don't know why, but death fascinates. Death is the great unknown. It's something that nobody understands.

PETER: *So to deal with a character who embodies death is, in a way, to investigate what death means?*

SIMON: Yeah. You've got it to a "T." He has to be one of the most feared villains in comics because he is pure 100% death. So I think he's quite disgusting.

PETER: *So a story about him taps into primal fears.*

SIMON: Yeah.

PETER: *He's not just a costumed criminal robbing banks.*

SIMON: *(Laughier.)* Well, no. It's like what I feel about Batman himself: he's like dicing with death. He almost wants to die. That's why he's risking his neck all the time, you know, because he's so fucked up in the head about his mother and father dying and everything else. He's screwed up in that respect. He's almost on his way out as it is, you know.

PETER: *So it's almost as if death is his real enemy from the start, because he's in the business of crimefighting, because death claimed his parents.*

SIMON: Exactly.

PETER: *So, as you say, it's almost as if he's got a death wish, but at the same time he's always fighting people who are trying to kill him. So it's like a struggle between life and death.*

SIMON: What we're talking about is very, very interesting, but JUDGMENT ON GOTHAM doesn't really deal with this. It's not that in-depth. It's very one-dimensional. Judge Death is just death, and he goes running around killing people.

PETER: *Still, the story must have some subtext to explain why it has such emotional resonance.*

SIMON: No, it doesn't, really. There might be, if you look hard enough, but it's not apparent.

PETER: *On the surface, then, it's basically just a fun story?*

SIMON: It's just basically a fun story, but it has got a black humor. I think the more deep kind of stuff is more for **Grant Morrison** and **Alan Moore** and these kinds of guys. Which I would in fact like to work with and indulge the kind of thing we were talking about back there. I think it's interesting on both sides of the coin: the slapstick or the really serious kind of shit.

PETER: *We were also talking previously about the idea that Batman and Judge Dredd were similar types of characters, both being obsessive crimefighters. But you said you had a great deal of respect for Batman and looked up to him, whereas you saw Judge Dredd as more of a caricature of a crimefighter.*

SIMON: Yeah. Judge Dredd just totally lacks any kind of personality; I feel Batman does, as well. He's a visually strong character. Judge Death is a real character in the story, because you can relate to him more than to Batman and Judge Dredd.

PETER: *You saw Batman and Dredd as two sides of the same coin, but one was the hero portrayed seriously and the other was the hero portrayed absurdly.*

SIMON: Yeah, I feel I've changed my mind since we talked last, because I feel Judge Dredd is actually a more realistic character, because you actually get characters like that in South Africa, you know? Or in places like Russia, a police state where Judge Dredd would be totally acceptable. But in the context of our own countries, that kind of thing would not be acceptable.

Batman is more farcical because Judge Dredd actually has a real purpose. He's a loner, and he lives in a violent society, and so he acts as he does because he has to, in order to survive, to carry his job through. So Batman is more farcical because he has no real purpose. What is his motivation? The fact that his parents have been killed. That's his motivation to go around in a cloak.

It could be completely vice versa, if you like.

PETER: *Last time you said that Batman represented ideals that could be admired, whereas Dredd did not.*

SIMON: Judge Dredd has got zero ideals, whereas Batman's more a kind of medieval knight, kind of an Ivanhoe-type of character. Sometimes I think he's almost too goody-goody.

PETER: *Although last time you were saying how visually he reminded you of a devil figure, and that you even tried to make Gotham City look hot, as if it were a city turned to hell.*

SIMON: Yeah. I thought Gotham was a sort of stylized New York — what it might be in, say, another five years time, were it'll be even more stuffy and crowded. The feeling that comes across, living in that environment, is that it's very stuffy and hot. It can be a nice winter's day, but it's still claustrophic. I mean, you know, you live there, for Christ's sake.

PETER: *Yes. I don't think I'll have to wait five years. Five months will probably do it.*

SIMON: *(Laughter.)*

PETER: *Have you been to New York, or did you just get an impression of this place from watching television and movies?*

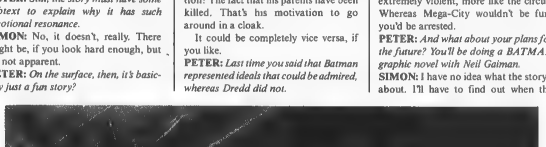
SIMON: I get it from the way that people talk to me who I speak to in America. I don't know, it's just a general feeling I get from, yeah, I suppose from what I see. I live in the country, the green fields of England. When I go to London, I find it incredibly claustrophobic and a particularly unfriendly place. So if you equate that to New York, which is going to be fifty times bigger, up and down and in every direction, I can imagine it's going to be absolutely dreadful.

PETER: *Actually, London seems to me to be very peaceful compared to New York.*

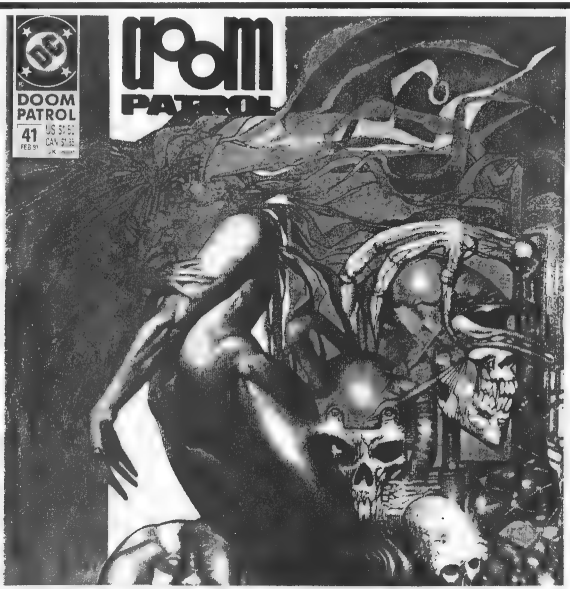
SIMON: It came around to my view on Mega-City. I see it as a cold, Giger-type of environment. I should think Gotham would be more a bubbly place, although extremely violent, more like the circus. Whereas Mega-City wouldn't be fun; you'd be arrested.

PETER: *And what about your plans for the future? You'll be doing a BATMAN graphic novel with Neil Gaiman.*

SIMON: I have no idea what the story's about. I'll have to find out when the



"Ideally, what I'd like is just to do painted covers."



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script has been written. I'm also doing a Superman story with **Dave Gibbons.** And all the next year I'll be doing LOBO.

PETER: *Including what I'm told is a Christmas special.*

SIMON: That's right, which is again exceptionally farcical. Lobo has a contract out on Father Christmas.

PETER: *And has a knife fight with him, I'm told.*

SIMON: *(Laughter.)* Yeah, well, Father Christmas is really depicted as a gangster kind of character. I think he's actually making nuclear warheads, not toys. I think that's what I remember. So it's got a sort of serious angle, I suppose, if you want to look at it that way.

I've started to work more with Epic, stuff I like, like **HELLRAISER** covers. It seems to me since I've been doing the DOOM PATROL covers it's been generating interest in my doing other covers. Ideally, what I'd like is just to do painted covers. Because if I can make $1500 on a cover, to do the same I'd have to do an entire episode of LOBO.

Money. That's what it's all about, isn't it?

PETER: *Well, I'd like to think it's about more, too.*

SIMON: Oh, yeah. If you can do the jobs you want to do, and get money at the same time, it's like getting paid for what you were going to do anyway. It's like I've heard some actor on television say, "I'm getting paid for doing this, and it's what I love to do." Which is marvelous, you know.

PETER: *That's the secret.*

SIMON: I'm fortunate enough to do this at present. I can more-or-less pick and choose, for the time being.

PETER: *It sounds as if doing covers, single images, interests you more than comics storytelling, doing a narrative over many pages.*

SIMON: Yes, it does. I prefer just to do one image. It's like if I had a guitar, I'd have to learn how to play it in a day or get rid of it. I can only concentrate for a very short period of time. I adore doing comics, but to convey everything, to do everything in just one image, is far more satisfying to me.

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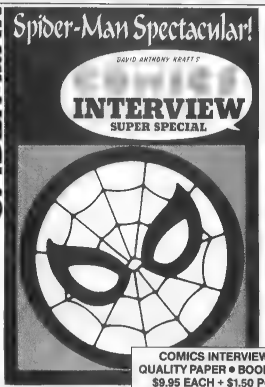

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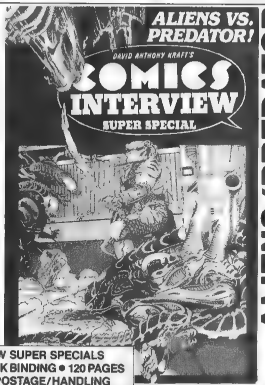

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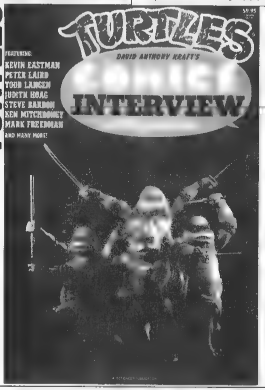

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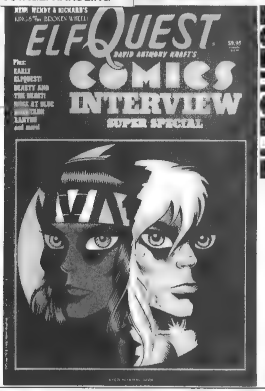

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"I was worried the material would be too satanic, but it's

VAL SEMEIKS

Over the last five years, Val Semeiks has earned a reputation as a versatile artist whose style skillfully balances high drama with low humor, bombastic physicality with moody atmosphere, and crystal-clear storytelling with painstakingly detailed linework.

Semeiks' editors know him as an easy-going, hard-working fellow who always meets his deadlines. (And if you think that's *no special accomplishment, then ask the next editor you meet at a convention for horror stories about cranky freelancers who can't read a calendar!)*

THE DEMON is one of DC's more successful direct-sales titles, due in no small part to the deft pencilling (and occasional cover inking) that Semeiks has contributed since the mid-1990 debut of the current inception of the title. THE DEMON has had three previous runs: A Jack Kirby title in the early 1970s, a limited series in 1986 and a feature in the ACTION COMICS WEEKLY anthology series in 1989.

This interview was conducted by Semeiks' frequent collaborator, Charles Santino. They have worked together on stories for SAVAGE TALES, CONAN THE BARBARIAN, and AESOP'S FABLES, which Santino writes and edits for Fantagraphics . . .

CHARLES SANTINO: *You're into your second year on THE DEMON and before that you pencilled CONAN THE BARBARIAN for two and a half years. Why have you stuck out these fairly long runs on these titles?*

VAL SEMEIKS: Well, I think that's just the way it's worked out. The two situations actually are different. CONAN was my first monthly assignment and coincidentally a character I'd always wanted to draw. I enjoy heroic fantasy, particularly the original **Robert E. Howard** stuff, so getting a chance at CONAN was great. I stayed with it for as long as I did because I wanted to bring the book

not. It's very much an action book in the Kirby tradition."

Here and throughout interview, rare and unseen pencils by Val for THE DEMON.

back to its early glory. I was never able to do that and eventually I had to move on. The inking, colorng, and especially the Flexographic printing were always disappointing. The finished art never looked as I'd envisioned it.

After CONAN I wanted to work on a superhero book. I did DETECTIVE COMICS ANNUAL #2 for DC and then agreed to pencil THE DEMON. I thought the initial storyline in Hell would be a lot of fun to draw. I was a little worried that the material would be too Satanic, with more horror elements than I wanted to get into, but it's nothing like that at all. Instead of being anti-religious, it's very much an action book in the **Kirby** tradition. The Demon is a nasty bad guy, but the book has so much humor it makes the character palatable and tempers the occasional bit of gruesome business. We've managed to keep it out of the "Mature Readers" category. I especially like the book's current direction. **Alan Grant,** the writer, and I have hit a nice groove — a good mixture of action, humor, and horror. There's still a lot more potential in THE DEMON, so I'd like to continue with it.

CHARLES: *How closely are you*

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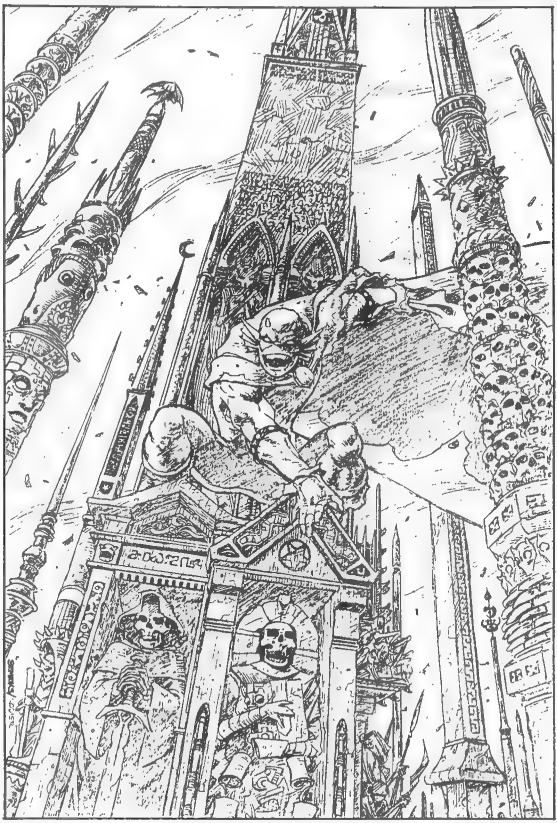
"It's the artist's job to provide acting and visual



characterization, create mood and heighten drama."

working with THE DEMON's writer, Alan Grant?

VAL: Not very. He's in England and I live in upstate New York. I've spoken to him several times on the phone. I work from finished scripts that come from my editor, **Dan Raspler,** so I'm doing a lot more talking to him. I would like to work more closely with Alan, so as soon as DC is ready to spring for a trip to England, I'll be happy to make the flight!

CHARLES: *THE DEMON is selling fairly well while books like THE SANDMAN and SHADE THE CHANGING MAN get a lot of press. Any comment?*

VAL: I haven't seen much written on THE DEMON in the press. I'd certainly like to see it get more attention than it does. Every artist hopes the titles they're working on get lots of acclaim and attention. I don't really know what appeals to critics or how they choose which books to review of the hundreds that published.

From the reviews I've read of various comics, I think the critics tend to place too much emphasis on the writing and not enough on the art. You'll see reviewers go on at length about a comic's script and wrap up with "oh, yeah, the art was good, too!" Well, the writing and the art contribute equally in comics and neither is more important. The combination of script and pictures make up the comic's "storytelling." The critics are reviewing the stories when they should really review the storytelling. The exact same script can seem dull or exciting depending on the artist's contribution. It's the artist's job to provide the "acting" and visual characterization, create mood, and heighten drama. The artist controls the design and guides the pacing, giving the book its distinct look, its visual identity. All this stuff is a very important part of comics that's often overlooked or underplayed. As a combination of written word and visual elements, comics are much more like movies than like novels or short stories and should be reviewed that way. You wouldn't expect to read a movie review that only talked about the script because you're not watching a script up on the screen. The script is gone, it's become either a good movie based on that script or a bad movie based on that script. The same principle applies to comics.

CHARLES: *There's a real edge of hysteria in THE DEMON. How much of that is in Alan Grant's scripts and how much is in your interpretation?*

VAL: I think it's a combination. We try for a wacky, outrageous sort of story, but we keep the humor from crossing the line into silliness. The more plausible the story seems the better the satire will work. Of course, the "plausibility" I'm talking about here is within the context of a standard, action-oriented superhero comic, with its already much-exaggerated reality. Humor can work well in a serious setting -- sort of a "DR. STRANGELOVE" approach to comics.

Alan has gotten very good at this kind of comic book. His mixture of characters and storylines has gotten better with each issue. The artwork contributes a fast-paced, lively kind of storytelling. It has a flamboyance that brings out the humor and the horror of Alan's writing.

CHARLES: *What kinds of situations and conflicts seem to work best in THE DEMON?*

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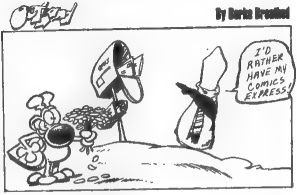

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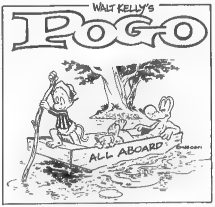

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"Fandom is by and large a very intelligent group of people."

very reasonable. Dan thought we were being a bit too exploitive with Batman. He worries about that kind of stuff. In fact, we're planning an "all-exploitation" issue featuring hordes of guest stars! Anyway, I thought Batman was a natural inclusion in THE DEMON. Sure, his appearances help sales, but not as much as when the movie was playing in theaters. Lobo has an extended guest appearance. He's been a lot of fun to work with and reminds me somewhat of Conan. Lobo's hot right now and will undoubtedly help sales. THE DEMON provides an unusual vehicle for guest stars. I think the more unpredictable we are with who shows up, the better. It's a good book for some of DC's odder or lesser-known characters. How about the Bizarro Superman, for instance?

CHARLES: *You've been on the convention circuit lately. Where have you been and what have you learned about the readers and the industry?*

VAL: I have learned — happily enough — that fandom is by and large a very intelligent group of people. My experiences at conventions have been good ones. I enjoy doing them. I think it's good for the creative teams to talk to the fans and find out what they think. The fans have something to contribute. They can clue you in as to what they like in storylines, what they like about the artwork, and also what they *don't* like about the book — but generally the people who don't like your work don't come up to your table.

CHARLES: *What questions do you get asked most frequently at conventions?*

VAL: There's two. The first one is, "How do you break into comics?"

CHARLES: *How* do *you break into comics?*

VAL: Practice and perseverence. And there's some basic skill requirements. If you want to be an artist, you have to be able to draw, and you have to be able to tell a story with pictures. Being fast enough is also very important — every bit as important as having the talent to produce the work.

CHARLES: *And the other question?*

VAL: "What are your influences? Which I would answer, in a nutshell: **Jack Kirby,** LOONEY TUNES, and **Hal Foster.**

CHARLES: *What aspect of Hal Foster?*

VAL: The pure drawing skill and the attention to scenery, background, and architecture. I think **Hal Foster** did it better than anyone else.

CHARLES: *How about Jack Kirby?*

VAL: The raw, explosive comic-book sensibility of his stuff. Especially his heyday in the 1960s with THE FANTASTIC FOUR and THOR. He's been an influence on so many comic-book artists.

CHARLES: *Are you looking at Kirby's DEMON comics for reference on your version?*

VAL: Not so much for reference. There are specific characters that we're using that he created, so those guys have to be looked up. Generally, I don't use comics very much for reference. I use real photographic reference and other material. Comics themselves can be a problem. If you rely on current published material your work starts to look derivative.

CHARLES: *And how about the influence of LOONEY TUNES?*

VAL: The pacing and the humor is the only way I can put it. A lot of humorous influences that are in THE DEMON can be traced right to LOONEY TUNES.

CHARLES: *Do convention-goers remember your run on CONAN?*

VAL: Yes. The Conan fans tend to be a very dedicated group.

CHARLES: *You once told me several people have referred to some of your art as "1970s style" art. From whom have you heard this and what do you think they're talking about?*

VAL: I've heard it from editors regarding cover layouts and I'm still trying to figure out exactly what they mean. I've *taken* it to mean fight scene covers that feature a lot of background with characters that tend to be in the middle distance, which I guess editors associate with the 1970s. It's probably easier to cite an example. Oddly enough, it's an example from the 1950s: **Frazetta's** famous cover for WEIRD SCIENCE FANTASY #29, sometimes called "the greatest comic cover ever drawn." I suspect that if I were to submit that cover layout today, it wouldn't be accepted. Or the editor would tell me to make the characters bigger, with less background, or something along those lines. I'm a **Frazetta** fan and I like his style and layout of his

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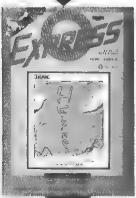

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"THE DEMON is not a gloomy, introspective comic."

VAL: When I agreed to do THE DEMON, I was really looking forward to doing the part of the storyline that took place in Hell in the first seven issues. As it turned out, I'm much happier with the storyline now that it's moved to Gotham City. In Hell the story meandered and got bogged down in continuity left over from previous runs of THE DEMON. Now the writing is tighter and much more focused. Klarion and Teekl were a lot of fun to work with. The use of Lobo was particularly clever. I thought the whole "Apocalypse Now!" storyline was very good.

In general I like comics that are fast-paced — barrelling along almost out of control — like the old **Kirby** FANTASTIC FOUR. I want things to happen, not just have characters sitting around whining about their personal problems. THE DEMON is not a gloomy, introspective comic. It's meant to be fun.

CHARLES: *How do you like working with a large cast of supporting characters in a comic book?*

VAL: I didn't like it in CONAN but I like it a lot in THE DEMON. It comes down to how the characters are handled. Characters have to develop and have clear goals and motivation. They can't just be there for the sake of being there. This happened in CONAN and the book became a soap opera. Too much talk about feelings. Too much "sensitivity training." Yecch. Conan got squeezed out of his own book. Give me action and villains with nefarious aims. Give me something exciting to draw. That's what I'm getting now in THE DEMON.

In THE DEMON, the supporting cast contributes to the overall tone and feel of the book. From the demons in Hell to Klarion's gang, the comic wouldn't be the same without them. I like Alan's choice of villains and use of guest stars. Harry Matthews — the guy who's just a face on a pillow — that's something completely different. Only Glenda and Randu strike me as a little ordinary. Jason Blood and his friends are not as interesting as Etrigan and his buddies.

CHARLES: *You seem to have a special talent for drawing the many animals, both real and fantastic, appearing in THE DEMON. Do you put extra effort into drawing animals?*

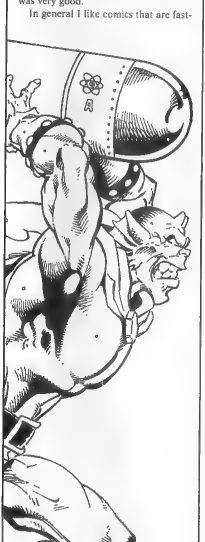
VAL: It's part of the diversity of being able to draw. Once you understand the basics of drawing with shapes, then you can learn how to draw animals or pretty much anything. I think a lot of comic-book artists have concentrated so much on people and faces and human drawing that they haven't spent much time on the other stuff. Or maybe they lack good reference on it.

CHARLES: *There have been quite a few outstanding covers on THE DEMON. How are the covers for each issue created?*

VAL: On the ones that I draw, I generally supply Dan with three or four cover sketches that show him layouts and ideas I try to give him a mix. One close-up, one medium-type shot, and so on. As different as possible from each other. And from those he'll pick one, sometimes with suggestions for making it better, and then I'll proceed to pencils. Usually he picks my favorite, but not always.

CHARLES: *We've seen Batman, Lobo, and The Phantom Stranger in THE DEMON. How do you feel about guest stars? Do they sell more copies of the book?*

VAL: I don't think there's anything wrong with guest stars. It's something that's been done in comics for as long as I can remember. It can be a way of energizing a book. Predictably, Batman was our first guest star. Etrigan has guest-starred in Batman stories so an appearance by Batman in THE DEMON seems



"Editors seem to be shying away from the covers with

action scenes to try to get some sort of human interest."

artwork and I try to incorporate that into some of my covers and they typically get rejected. "1970s style" is a funny sort of phrase that I never heard until I started working in comics. It seems like editors almost have a checklist of requirements that a cover has to fill. If a cover doesn't meet the pre-set requirements, they don't know what to make of it and they would prefer not to use it. Today's editor tends to want the character as big as possible. Editors seem to be shying away from covers with straight action scenes to try to get some sort of "human interest" angle on the cover. I tend to like an action scene — I guess that makes me a "70s style" kind of artist — at least for covers.

CHARLES: *What's coming up in THE DEMON?*

VAL: After the Lobo appearance, Etrigan travels to the Beyond Region for a few issues. The Beyond Region is where Klarion was banished to in the **Kirby** issues. There will be a crossover with Wonder Woman. One of the major demons from Hell — Morax or Asteroth — will come to wreak havoc on Gotham City. Plus we'll do the "all-exploitation" issue and maybe another all-singing issue.

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DOUGLAS MICHAEL ©1991
"IT'S ALWAYS THE SAME...
I'M IN MY PICK-UP TRUCK-
DRIVIN' THRU TOTAL DESOLATION
WHEN UP AHEAD-
IS THIS WHITE BOY-
PLEASE MAN.
DESPARATE FOR A RIDE."
YA' KNOW?
SO I PULL OVER.
I NEED A LIFT.
HE SAYS.
ALRIGHTY...
I SAY.
BUT, I SHOULD WARN YOU,
"I CAN'T ALWAYS SEE THE ROAD."
THEN I LAUGH.
AND HE LAUGHS.
AND OFF WE GO.
UNTIL SOMETIME LATER, WHEN HE SAYS TO ME:
"HEY OLD MAN."
MIND IF I TAKE THE WHEEL?
"NO, I DON'T MIND," I SAY.
SO I GET OUT WHILE HE SLIDES OVER-
THEN SPEEDS OFF LEAVING ME IN THE DUST-
"BUT I TELL YA, I DON'T MIND-
'CAUSE THAT WHITE BOY IS BLINDER THAN I EVER WAS-
AND HE ALWAYS CRASH N' BURN."

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"Visual Concepts is a company I formed in 1973."

MURPHY ANDERSON

There's a handful of comics artists I'd put on top of a heap of "realistic" renderers — men such as Wally Wood, Lou Fine, Reed Crandall, Jim Steranko, Paul Gulacy and Russ Manning.

Murphy Anderson belongs in there, too.

*Murphy's majestic figures have graced the pages of DC Comics for many years now, and you probably remember him best for his '80s work on HAWKMAN and THE SPECTRE. But he's been responsible for a passel of other artwork, as well . . . from PLANET COMICS in the 1940s through LARS OF MARS in the 1950s through a host of well-done science-fiction stories in MYSTERY IN SPACE and STRANGE ADVENTURES. Then, there's his excellent work on the BUCK ROGERS newspaper strip, and his continuation of Will Eisner's Connie Rodd and company in P*S MAGAZINE for the armed forces. And that's not even taking into account his inking work on Superman, Adam Strange, The Atom and many others!*

It's hard to sum up a career like Murphy's in a couple of paragraphs. What say we let him speak for himself . . .

LOU MOUGIN: *When I called your number I was greeted by a lady that informed me that I had reached Visual Concepts. Tell me a little about Visual Concepts.*

MURPHY ANDERSON: Visual Concepts is a company I formed in 1973 . . . basically so that I could bid on the P*S MAGAZINE contract.

LOU: *That's the magazine you got from Will Eisner, right?*

MURPHY: No, I didn't get it from Will. There was a contractor that had it for two years before us. The Army was unhappy with them, declined to pick up its options and put the contract out to bid. At that point, I heard that it was up for bid and that Will was not going to bid on it. As it turned out, he actually didn't bid on it although he was involved with one of the other bidders. I didn't realize that. I am not sure what I would have done had I known. As it was, I didn't know and came in low bidder.

LOU: *Yes, I have a few issues of your P*S MAGAZINE. And even though Will is a tough act to follow, I think you did a good job on it. Do you still do P*S for the Army?*

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"I would say that Will Eisner and Lou Fine were my

MURPHY: No, I held the contract for two five-year periods. The contracts weren't consecutive because I didn't turn in the low bid at the end of my first five-year contract. Once again the contract was held by someone who couldn't perform and the Army cancelled them out and negotiated with me for another five-year period.

LOU: *I guess you were just so good that they couldn't let you get away?*

MURPHY: I wouldn't say that. It's just that it's such an unusual product that not too many people have a feel for it or understand it. I think it would be very difficult for someone to do it that hasn't been in the military.

LOU: *For those of you unfamiliar with P*S MAGAZINE it stands for Preventive Service, correct?*

MURPHY: No, actually, it stands for what it looks like, POST SCRIPT. It's a PS to the Army's authorized manuals.

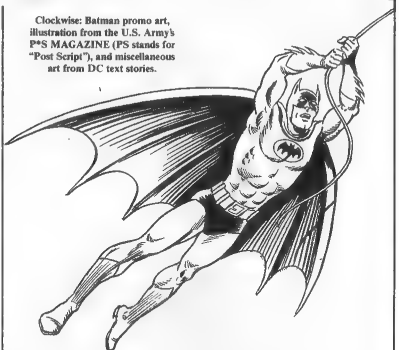
LOU: *The magazine tells you how to maintain weapons, that sort of thing?*

MURPHY: Actually, how to maintain *any* Army equipment. They have articles from maintaining medical equipment to rifles, to axes, to helicopters. Anything that the Army uses theoretically would be covered by this magazine.

LOU: *Punctuated by characters like Joe Dope, right?*

MURPHY: Joe Dope goes way back. The Army decided that he wasn't a good model soldier and was insulting to the average soldier. As you know, people have tended to become more sensitive about these things. I think it was a shame in a way because Joe Dope was a lot of fun. Will really knew how to do that type of satire and it came out beautifully. I personally don't believe the average soldier was insulted by it.

LOU: *Probably no more than if he read WILLIE AND JOE and such.*



Clockwise: Batman promo art, illustration from the U.S. Army's P*S MAGAZINE (PS stands for "Post Script"), and miscellaneous art from DC text stories.

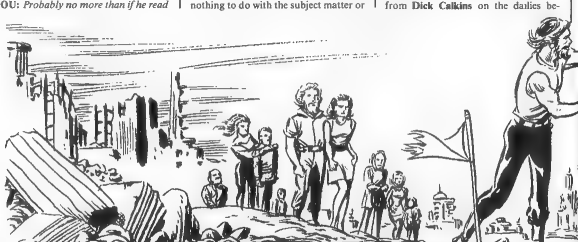
MURPHY: Right, but still, that's the Army's way of thinking. The P*S editorial types started counting the number of girls and watching their clothing very closely. I'm digressing a bit, but they had letters from various congressmen and senators . . . investigating complaints made by Army personnel, basically.

LOU: *Right, we had Connie in the altogether a few times . . .*

MURPHY: I never had that particular problem although one of my drawings made it to **William Proxmire's** desk and it made it to one of the press services . . . achieving quite a bit of notoriety. It had nothing to do with the subject matter or that the girl wasn't clothed . . . only that she was scantily dressed.

LOU: *You said a couple of times your favorite comic strips, as a kid, were PRINCE VALIANT, FLASH GORDON and BUCK ROGERS. I guess that makes some of your idols Hal Foster, Alex Raymond, Dick Calkins and Lou Fine on DOLL MAN?*

MURPHY: Dick Calkins is a sort of qualified idol. My favorite artist on BUCK ROGERS was **Russel Keaton. Keaton** ghosted the Sunday pages, before **Rick Yager.** Actually, **Yager** was the second artist to sign BUCK and I think I qualify as the third. I took over from **Dick Calkins** on the dailies be-



favorite artists . . . and very influential on my style."

PYS MAGAZINE ©1991 U.S. Army

coming the second credited artist on the dailies.

LOU: *I'm looking at a couple of pages from the dailies from about 1959 and they look really, really good. I notice one of the characters looks like Wayne and Hollis Hobard (two of the Atomic Knights), which you did about a year or so later as a feature in STRANGE ADVENTURES.*

MURPHY: Well, when I developed different character types, I tended to use variations of them in different features. Those two brothers in the Atomic Knights I made identical twins just to help preserve my sanity.

LOU: *Also made them easier to draw!*

MURPHY: Exactly — different suits of armor but they were identical twins.

LOU: *I can see a lot of Alex Raymond, Hal Foster, and others showing up in your art, in your approach to things, especially in regard to the human figure. And if he wasn't your contemporary I would also compare you favorably to Reed Crandall?*

MURPHY: I admired Reed greatly and there were times early in my career when I tried to swipe his figures . . . but he wasn't a primary influence on me. I would say that Will and Lou were my two favorite comic book artists . . . and very influential on my "style."

LOU: *Was that like when Eisner was doing things like HAWKS OF THE SEAS?*

MURPHY: Right, exactly.

LOU: *How did BUCK ROGERS, of all things, influence you?*

MURPHY: I was aware of BUCK ROGERS vaguely as a kid, and I did listen to the radio program. I missed the serial, although I did see the FLASH GORDON serials. BUCK ROGERS was being reprinted by FAMOUS FUNNIES and that's where I really latched on to BUCK ROGERS. That was the stuff, as I said before, that was done by **Russell Keaton.**

LOU: *What made you decide that you wanted to become an artist; that you*

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"I like to feel that my style just evolved."

wanted to work in comics?

MURPHY: I just loved comics as far back as I can remember. My mother was a school teacher, she of course stopped teaching when she started the family. She said that I actually pestered her so much about reading the newspaper comics that she actually sat down with me and taught me to read using comics. You can say, literally, that I have been reading comics since I was about four or five years old.

LOU: *This was back in the 1930s when adventure strips were really coming into their own, right?*

MURPHY: My home town paper basically carried the NEA comics, which were ALLEY OOP, CAPTAIN EASY and such. That meant that I didn't get to see FLASH GORDON, BUCK ROGERS or TARZAN. Later on, in the late '30s and early '40s, they did start to carry quite a few strips which were from King Features, United Features, etc.

LOU: *Right, and in beautiful full-page format. And your first job in comics was for Fiction House, was it not?*

MURPHY: Yes, that's correct, in early 1944. I actually worked for **Jack Byrne** at the time. **Jack Byrne** hired me as a staff artist.

LOU: *And STAR PIRATES was your first job?*

MURPHY: They had the script waiting for me on Monday morning when I reported to start work.

LOU: *I'm looking at an old STAR PIRATES strip right now and the only way I could even tell it was your work was because in the last panel it was signed Murphy Anderson '45. Your style appears to have developed like many of the DC classic people, Gil Kane and Carmine Infantino come to mind. It developed quickly in the 1950s to what later became your classic style when you were all working for DC.*

MURPHY: I guess so. I hesitat: to say that, because no one ever asked me to work in any particular way. I like to feel that my style just evolved. It is a natural thing much like your handwriting would change as you get older. I think we are *all* still learning how to draw.

LOU: *At Fiction House you were on STAR PIRATES for a few years . . .*

MURPHY: I started on STAR PIRATES when I was seventeen and, of course, I knew I was going to be drafted. Ultimately I was, but since I volunteered for immediate induction, I wound up in the Navy. That was in late 1944.

LOU: *What was your duty in the Navy?*

MURPHY: While I was in boot camp I passed the Navy's Eddy test. The test was

WITHIN THE BANK VAULT HE FORMS TO SOLIDIFY FROM ASTRAL PROJECTION BY WHICH HE PASSED THROUGH SOLID MATTER...
HEY...
DOCTOR FATE!
AND HE GOT WISE TO US, 2
LUNGING FORWARD, THE MASTER OF MAGIC [illegible] OUT A REAL LIFE F.I.S.T.
THREE GUNS COME OUT OF THREE SHOULDER HOLSTERS...
ONE--TWO--THREE B...M'S
AND HE'LL BE OUT!
BUT--A SINGLE SWEEP OF THAT BLUE BOLT ARM SENDS THE MONEY-SACKS FLYING AT THE GUARDS!
PAY-OFF EXPECT!

From SHOWCASE #56, 1965, with Dr. Fate and Hourman, by Fox and Anderson.

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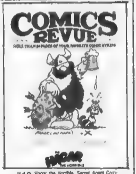

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#27 The Phantom, Bloom County, Modesty Blaise, Hagar the Horrible, Flash Gordon, Popeye, Steve Canyon, Gasoline Alley

#28 Bloom County, Modesty Blaise, Hagar the Horrible, Steve Canyon, The Phantom, Popeye, Flash Gordon, Gasoline Alley COVER

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#30 Moon Card: Memorial issue. Steve Canyon

Annual 2 Modesty Blaise, Bloom County, The Phantom, Hagar the Horrible, Steve Canyon, Popeye, Flash Gordon, Gasoline Alley COVER: FREDDY & FRIENDS!

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"I did pulp illustrations for about five years."

the Navy's way of finding people who could be taught to maintain radar. I ended up in RT school, or Radio Technicians school. Anyone that passed the Eddy test had no option, they had to go to RT school. I had lined up a good job on the BAINBRIDGE MAIN SHEET, a weekly base newspaper, and had visions of being close to New York and close to my home town. I wound up in Chicago. They called Chicago Radio City, at least the Navy did. I didn't actually complete the schooling, I flunked the first month . . . an intensive month of study and testing designed to weed out the incapable. I was in the CO's office and told that I did fine in theory and in mathematical tests but that I was "all thumbs" when it came to working on the bench, soldering and that sort of thing. They said that if I wanted to try it again I could . . . but that they had a slot in their visual aids department in the Chicago Loop . . . a very special place. It was run by **Captain Eddy** himself, he for whom the Eddy test was named. (He actually wrote the test.) Eddy was a retired Navy submarine captain who came back into uniform during World War II. When WWII started, he was the chief engineer for the Balaban and Katz Company. This was a firm which owned a string of movie houses and the WBKB (then experimental) television station. One of the four primary RT schools was right on the premises of the WBKB studio in the State-Lake Building in Chicago's famed "Loop" area. Since **Captain Eddy** had that special alliance with **WBKB** he was able to put the school right in with the studio. Since **Captain Eddy** was a very capable cartoonist himself, he had established a fantastic visual aids department. I ended up working there until VE Day.

LOU: *You could say that it was a precursor to your work for P*S.*

MURPHY: Right, exactly! That's what **Captain Eddy** was doing for the Navy. He used cartoons, paintings, anything he could come up with that would aid and simplify teaching.

LOU: *You did this a couple of years for the Navy?*

MURPHY: No, actually only a couple of months because the war ended in 1945. I got out of boot camp and hit Chicago in January or February of '45. I was there until VE Day when they started disbanding everything. Then I was sent to Great Lake NTS where I was attached to an OGU (out going unit) but then the atom bomb was used and the war was over! That was the end of my Navy career. Say what you want about the use of the bomb but I don't know anyone in the service that was against it at the time.

Murphy Anderson's Adam Strange illustration for a text story.

LOU: *Once you got out of the Navy, you got back into comics?*

MURPHY: Right, I went back to Fiction House. They gave me STAR PIRATE scripts and I actually managed to do a couple while I was in the Navy. While I was in Chicago I struck up an acquaintance with **Ray Palmer** at AMAZING STORIES. I did some work for them, pulp illustrations. I did pulp illustrations for about five years before they started up their comics . . . which is how I got involved with Ziff-Davis. **Herm Bollin**, the art director in Chicago, recommended me to **Jerry Siegel** in their new office in New York. Which is how I got to know and work with Jerry.

LOU: *One in particular was MAN O' MARS, which you drew and he scripted . . .*

MURPHY: I think perhaps you're confusing that up with a book of reprints done by Fiction House. It was actually LARS OF MARS. That was Jerry's idea, and we discussed it at length. At the time, he was trying to come up with some features. LARS OF MARS was sort of a

"Gardner Fox, a lovely human being, and Julie Schwartz,

cross between SUPERMAN and BUCK ROGERS.

LOU: *Ziff-Davis Publishing, in the 1950s, did go under like quite a few other comic companies.*

MURPHY: Well, they had the resources to stick it out. When the **Wertham** thing started they just decided to get out. They continued with AMAZING and FANTASTIC quite a while but the books had become digest in size . . . more like ASTOUNDING had become. They were publishers of many varied periodicals like RADIO NEWS, and POPULAR PHOTOGRAPHY . . . chiefly technical magazines . . . FLYING magazine comes to mind. They also had a line of hardcover books. It was a very substantial company.

LOU: *After Ziff-Davis Publishing quit and Fiction House went under . . . you became involved with DC?*

MURPHY: Well, no, DC was sort of an accident. I came in with a script one day for **Jerry Siegel,** I mean a finished story, and they said, "Murphy, I'm sorry but the writers haven't delivered scripts and I don't have anything to give you." I had made the move back to New York to work for them. My wife and I, virtual newlyweds, had taken an apartment and I had all this responsibility. So I went home and got my portfolio and called on several publishers — DC happened to be one of them. I came back the next day to see **Julie Schwartz** because he wasn't in when I called. I got a script from him immediately. That's how I got started with DC.

LOU: *I assume at that time that it was science-fiction work?*

MURPHY: Exactly, it was for STRANGE ADVENTURES. I started working for both STRANGE ADVENTURES and MYSTERY IN SPACE.

LOU: *You originated Captain Comet for STRANGE ADVENTURES?*

MURPHY: Not really, it was **Carmine Infantino** who did the first two or three issues. I always enjoyed doing science fiction. You know, during those years I also worked with my father, who was in the taxi cab business.

LOU: *So you drove a cab?*

MURPHY: Well I did, sort of. *(Laughter.)* When I was a kid growing up he was trying to get established in the taxi business. He always wanted me to work with him. Naturally I was torn between the two. Ultimately when my kid brother was old enough to work in the business I got out. I then went back into comics full time.

LOU: *I'm glad you did because I think if you had been a taxi driver I don't think I'd be interviewing you right now.* (Laughter.) *What was it like working on comics with Julius Schwartz?*

MURPHY: Well, Julie and I hit it off right away because we had **Ray Palmer** as a friend in common. I think it was a natural for the both of us to get together.

LOU: *Were you taking the approach of John W. Campbell?*

MURPHY: I don't think so, Julie wanted things to have a scientific truth to them and not some far-fetched illogical theory.

LOU: *His books were always very scientific if not educational. Your typical DC science-fiction comic was different*

CAPTAIN COMET'S VERY NAME HAS COME TO MEAN BREATH-TAKING ADVENTURES ON STRANGE AND FAR-OFF WORLDS... WHILE THE NAME ADAM BLAKE MEANS, TO THE FEW WHO KNOW HIM, ONLY A QUIET AND SCHOLARLY LIBRARY CLERK! YET WITH THE FATE OF THE EARTH HANGING IN THE BALANCE, IT WAS ADAM BLAKE WHO WAS CHOSEN TO SAVE IT--AND BE COME CAPTAIN COMET! DID SOMEONE MAKE A TRAGIC MISTAKE? ALMOST! BUT IT SO HAPPENS THAT, UNKNOWN TO ALL, ADAM AND THE HEROIC MAN OF DESTINY ARE ONE AND THE SAME PERSON!
THE ROBOT REPAIRS ITSELF-- FASTER THAN I CAN SNAGH IT!
STORY JOHN BROOME ART: MURPHY ANDERSON

Here: Captain Comet, from STRANGE ADVENTURES #14, 1951. And on our next page, the character as he appears this year, from DC's new WHO'S WHO project.

were really collaborators more than editor and writer."

from, say, an EC kind of thing, which seemed to be horror stories disguised as science fiction.

MURPHY: I admired those guys, they did fantastic things over at EC. Especially the horror stuff which I could *not* have been comfortable with drawing. I count myself lucky that I didn't get involved because I know most of those guys had a tough time finding mainstream comic book work after the Senate hearings.

LOU: *That was basically what put EC out of business. I guess the nice thing about DC was that they had a much more wholesome image. So you did Captain Comet for quite a while?*

MURPHY: I drew that for quite some time, I drew it off and on, because I had gone back to North Carolina to work for my father's business. Comics became sort of side line for several years.

LOU: *In the late '50s you did one of my all-time favorite stories in Atomic Knights; John Broome was the writer on that.*

MURPHY: I really enjoyed working on that series. I enjoyed drawing it immensely. Problem was . . . it was a back breaker; as a freelance artist you have to be aware of how much time you're spending on a job. That job was taking me, maybe, half again as long as another job would. It was one of the reasons that I think Julie only published it quarterly. He alternated it with two other strips. None of us got hurt that way, with the strips that were so demanding.

LOU: *The imagination that John put into the series made it, really, a classic strip.*

MURPHY: I always felt that John had some of the qualities in his work that **Stanley Weinbaum** had. John was not a prolific writer. He was very slow and very thoughtful, very conscientious. He, like a lot of guys that were slow, had a rough time making a living in comics. .

LOU: *What they did, though, was really worth reading.*

MURPHY: John was, all in all, the best writer I ever worked with.

LOU: *That's saying quite a bit, especially when you did so much work with Gardner Fox.*

MURPHY: I don't mean to put Gardner, a lovely human being, down, but he and Julie were really collaborators more than editor and writer. I mean that was just the way he and Julie worked, they plotted so closely and carefully. Gardner would come up with the original idea and they would talk it out. I would often go to lunch with them and they would continue plotting so I was around while they were doing quite a bit of it.

LOU: *Besides your great inking work on Infantino's Adam Strange and Gil Kane's Atom, you finally got a chance at a mainstream superhero when you first did Hawkman, which was first in MYSTERY IN SPACE in 1963 and then in his own comic. I seem to remember that quite a few fans got shook up over the transition from Kubert's Hawkman to your Hawkman. Although I must say that I really loved your Hawkman.*

MURPHY: I have long been a big fan of **Kubert's** work so I had quite a bit of apprehension about taking over, but Joe just couldn't handle it on a regular basis.

LOU: *With all of his war work . . .*

MURPHY: That's right, he was so committed to that and the front office wouldn't have permitted him to be taken off of that.

LOU: *Once you were handling it then it became a regular feature and you did a very good job on it. That was probably your longest superhero feature, you did something like 26, 27 issues.*

MURPHY: I'm not sure how many I drew but I know the book lasted about that long. I did do 21 or 22 of them in addition to the MYSTERY IN SPACE appearances. HAWKMAN has always been a sort of second-tier feature and never had the sort of readership of, say, BATMAN or SUPERMAN — not even really as popular as THE FLASH or

"I just wanted to work with Will Eisner."

Buck Rogers by Murphy Anderson
AT EARTH G.H.Q....
I AM CAARO FROM PLANET TWO?. LISTEN TO ME CLOSELY... FOR EARTH'S VERY EXISTENCE DEPENDS ON IT!
MY PLANET, TWO?, HAS BEEN FORCIBLY TAKEN OVER BY THE TYRANT, ATTALON! HE PLOTS NOW TO SEIZE CONTROL OF EARTH...
CAARO, OUR SATELLITE DEFENSE SYSTEM CAN HANDLE ANY ATTACK!... EVEN ONE BY YOUR TYRANT RULER, ATTALON!
NOW, JUST A MINUTE....
HEH-HEH-LET HIM FINISH, BUCK!
FANTASTIC, CAARO! HOW DOES HE PLAN TO PULL OFF SUCH A CAPER?
BY THREATENING TO EXPLODE HYDRO-X BOMBS AT STRATEGIC SPOTS ALL OVER YOUR WORLD, CAPT. ROGERS!
HE'S RIGHT, BUCK! UNTIL JUST BEFORE THEY LANDED, ALL WE SAW OF HIS FLEET WAS A SHADOW!
CAN IT, ROGERS? ANY SHIPS ARRIVED HERE, UNDETECTED!
YOUR PLANET, AT THIS VERY MOMENT, CAN BE COMPLETELY DESTROYED BY THE TOUCH OF A BUTTON!
YOURS WILL BE A SIMPLE CHOICE ....EITHER SURRENDER UNCONDITIONALLY.... OR EARTH WILL BE DISINTEGRATED!
RIGHT.... AND FURTHERMORE, ATTALON HAS ALREADY HIDDEN HYDRO-X BOMBS ALL OVER EARTH!
7:28
7:29
BUCK ROGERS ©1949 John F. Dille Co

even GREEN LANTERN. It was probably on a par with THE ATOM.

LOU: *My favorite work that you did in the '60s was the Golden Age revival stuff — Doctor Fate and Hourman in SHOWCASE, and Black Canary and Starman in BRAVE AND BOLD. How did these come about?*

MURPHY: Well, Julie wanted to revive more characters and they were essentially a try-out. He felt that maybe as a team-up, a semi-JUSTICE LEAGUE kind of thing, that he could introduce two or three characters in a book. I think it worked very well. Really, those characters, other than THE SPECTRE, never had the drawing power to sustain themselves as a feature.

LOU: *In fact, with THE SPECTRE, it took something like a year or two before he got his own book.*

MURPHY: I did the first issue or so but I didn't stay on because I wanted to work with **Will Eisner.**

"Julie knew Lovecraft, and was his agent as well as a fan."

LOU: *That's when you were involved with P*S MAGAZINE . . . .*

MURPHY: Yes, and as a consequence I could only really handle a bimonthly magazine.

LOU: *The thing I come away with on your SPECTRE work was the great deal of imagination in the writing and you bringing it to realistic life with the art.*

MURPHY: Please don't get me wrong, Gardner wrote a good script, but Julie was so heavily involved that I think he should have been given some credit as more than editor on them. I'm sure Gardner would have agreed with me.

LOU: *Your second SPECTRE story, which was "Beyond the Sinister Barrier," was one of my favorite comic-book stories.*

MURPHY: That was based on a story by **Lovecraft.** Julie had known **Lovecraft** and he was his agent as well as a big fan. So that story drew heavily on **Lovecraft.**

LOU: *In "Beyond the Sinister Barrier"*

THE MEETING WITH CAARO, MYSTERIOUS SPACE-MAN FROM PLANET TWO, CONTINUES....
MY PEOPLE ARE UNDER THE TYRANNICAL RULE OF ATTALON! MY MEN AND I MANAGED THE IMPOSSIBLE--- WE ESCAPED!
CAARO, WE'VE ONLY YOUR WORD THAT ATTALON HAS HIDDEN HYDRO-X BOMBS ON EARTH---
IF IT'S PROOF YOU WANT, ROGERS--- CHECK OUT THE LAUNCHING PLATFORM AT SPACE-PORT 40---
YOU BET I WILL, BUT---
HELP US GET RID OF ATTALON AND I'LL SHOW YOU EXACTLY WHERE EACH HYDRO-X BOMB IS HIDDEN!
CHIEF, DR. HUER--- SEE THAT OUR "FRIEND" WAITS HERE UNTIL I RETURN!
TALK IS CHEAP, CAARO! PROVE WHAT YOU SAY IS TRUE!
ATTENTION, BOYS AND GIRLS
GET YOUR FREE OFFICIAL BUCK ROGERS SATELLITE PIONEER BADGE!
JUST TEAR OUT THIS COUPON AND MAIL IT, TOGETHER WITH A STAMPED, SELF-ADDRESSED ENVELOPE TO BUCK ROGERS % THIS NEWSPAPER.

Murphy Anderson's illustrious illustrations from 1958 BUCK ROGERS.

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COVER: STAR TREK

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#35 Gasoline Alley, Flash Gordon, Hagar the Horrible, Modesty Blaise, Lulgo, Popeye, The Phantom, Bloom County, Steve Canyon
COVER: REED WALLER

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#37 Hagar the Horrible, Steve Canyon, The Phantom, Lulgo, Brenda, Flash Gordon, Gasoline Alley

#38 Hagar the Horrible, The Phantom, Bloom County, Steve Canyon. COVER: WALT SANSKRAW

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#40 Outland, Lulgo, Hagar the Horrible, The Phantom, Gasoline Alley, Steve Canyon, Bloom County, Flash Gordon, Modesty Blaise

#41 Batman, Outland, Modesty Blaise, Bloom County, Flash Gordon, Hagar the Horrible, The Phantom, Gasoline Alley, Steve Canyon, Lulgo

#42 Calvin and Hobbes, Flash Gordon, Gasoline Alley, Modesty Blaise, Outland, Steve Canyon, Hagar the Horrible, The Phantom, Bloom County, Batman

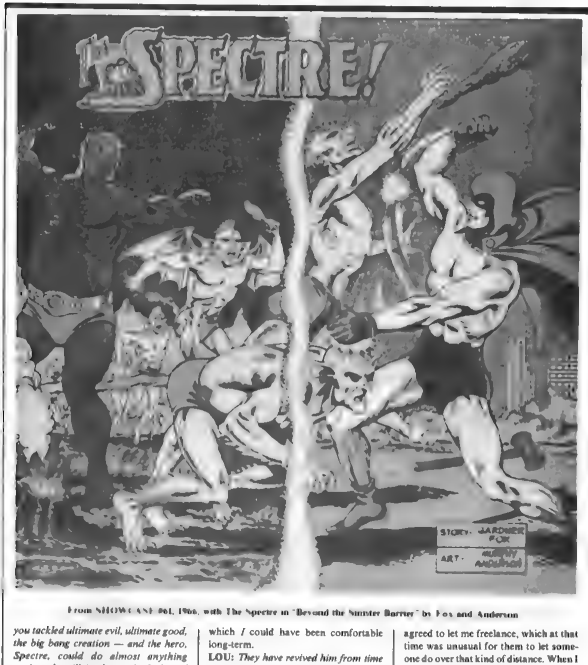
#43 Hagar the Horrible, Lulgo, Gasoline Alley, Flash Gordon, Outland, Steve Canyon, Calvin and Hobbes

#44 Modesty Blaise, Gasoline Alley, Canyon, Hagar, Flash Gordon, Calvin and Hobbes, The Phantom, Outland, Lulgo, Bloom County, Batman. COVER: TED ROOSTERMAN

#45 Batman, Outland, The Phantom, Hagar the Horrible, Beetle, Flash Gordon, Gasoline Alley, Steve Canyon, Bloom County, Lulgo, Calvin and Hobbes, Modesty Blaise

#46 Flash Gordon, Modesty Blaise, Bloom County, Lulgo, The Phantom, Calvin and Hobbes, Steve Canyon, Batman, Gasoline Alley. COVER: TOM BUSBY

"I enjoyed SPECTRE . . . there was basically one evil."



From SHOWCASE #61, 1966, with The Spectre in "Beyond the Sinister Barrier" by Fox and Anderson

you tackled ultimate evil, ultimate good, the big bang creation — and the hero, Spectre, could do almost anything against the villain that embodied total evil. How did you like doing that story?

MURPHY: Oh, I enjoyed it immensely but you've put your finger on the Achilles heel of that feature . . . there was basically only one evil that he could confront! So it would have been very difficult, I felt, to continue doing appropriate, interesting stories. **Mike Fleischer,** when he came along a little later, went with some really grotesque stuff. Which was fine, it was about the only direction left to take it . . . but was not one with which *I* could have been comfortable long-term.

LOU: *They have revived him from time to time with varied success. I guess it is the ultimate power thing that has its limitations. Even Superman has to have kryptonite and all of that stuff. Changing the subject slightly, tell me a little about your BUCK ROGERS work. How did you get the feature?*

MURPHY: Going back to my Chicago days . . . I met my wife when I was in the Navy. After I got out of the Navy but before we were married, I went back to New York to work; however, we couldn't tolerate being separated. Fiction House agreed to let me freelance, which at that time was unusual for them to let someone do over that kind of distance. When I got back to Chicago I always kept my eyes open for more work to do. One day I saw an ad in the CHICAGO TRIBUNE for an artist to do an adventure strip and it turned out to be the National Newspaper Syndicate (**John F. Dille**). They didn't tell me or anyone else that applied for quite awhile that they were looking for someone to take over **Dick Calkins'** work

LOU: *He was getting a little too old to work on the strip?*

MURPHY: Partially that. Also, the strip

BACK ISSUES

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"Curt Swan is the easiest guy I ever inked."

just wasn't staying competitive with the likes of **Foster, Caniff** or **Raymond.** Not that they were looking to find someone to fill shoes like that but they had to update it or the BUCK ROGERS strip was going to be history. I worked on the strip on two different occasions, in the late '40s and then again in the late '50s.

LOU: *Did you have to learn new work habits to make these daily deadlines?*

MURPHY: Not exactly, they had intended for me to do the Sunday strip when I got up a full head of steam but we eventually had a falling out and I left the strip. I went back to North Carolina to work with my father and then the **Ziff-Davis** thing came along.

LOU: *You had the chance to greatly enhance the pencils for a lot of great people at DC. People like Infantino, Kane and Swan are just a few names that come to mind. What was it like working on their stuff?*

MURPHY: Well, of course, I liked all of their work. To be honest with you, it's not as satisfying as doing your own work. But still, it was a way to make more money and with a family and a mortgage it was important. Inking was more readily available than complete assignments and, for me at least, was more lucrative.

LOU: *Around 1968 there was a big internal shake-up at DC and a lot of old hands left, new people came on. Around that time Infantino became the Editorial Director. Was that when you went to work for Eisner?*

MURPHY: That's when all of this came about. Carmine was appointed after I left DC. I continued to work for them although on a very limited basis. After I decided, for various reasons, to go back to freelancing I left Will and returned to DC for the next three or four years and did a lot of inking. That's how I got involved with the SUPERMAN characters on a steady basis.

LOU: *I remember those collaborations with Curt Swan.*

MURPHY: Curt is the easiest guy I ever inked, I think our styles were more compatible than any other person I worked with. That's not to say that **Gil Kane** wasn't easy, because he was. It's just that I was more in tune with Curt's work.

LOU: *I remember some of the work when Denny O'Neil was writing the book.*

MURPHY: Right, when I talked about favorite writer earlier, I didn't mean to slight Denny, either.

LOU: *To many of the fans those were some of the best SUPERMAN stories ever created. Getting back to Will Eisner, what was it like working for him at P*S*

ON A KNEE AND A TOE, HIS FIST RAMS OUT...
THREE--!
TWO--!
ASTRAL AVENGER SWINGS...
SHAKING OFF THE EFFECTS FROM HIS ATTACK, THE FIRST ROBSTER JOINS THE BENCH-SWINGER...
EACH OF US GRAB AN AR
OPPOSITE DIRECTIONS!

THE BRAVE AND THE BOLD #61, 1965, with Starman, again by Fox and Anderson.

"My favorite vehicle was BUCK ROGERS. I enjoyed the

MAGAZINE?

MURPHY: It was great, I enjoyed working with Will very much. He was a very approachable and a very likeable boss. I got more satisfaction out of working on P*S MAGAZINE than anything else I ever worked on. When I say satisfaction I don't mean artistically, but that I knew that I was working on something really worthwhile. One of the greatest thrills I think I ever had was knowing that I made a small contribution to a special booklet on the M-16 rifle. As you recall during our early involvement in Viet Nam, around 1965-66, the M-16 rifle was causing a lot of trouble and a lot of guys were getting hurt by it. The Army determined that the problem was improper maintenance of the weapon so they ordered production of a special booket through P*S and Will Eisner Productions.This little handbook became a DA PAM (Department of the Army Pamphlet) used by every soldier. After that publication came out, and I like to feel that there was a direct connection, the complaints died down. I would like to feel that we saved a few lives. P*S is a wonderful institutton.

LOU: *During the 1970s it seemed as if you were employed mostly as an inker. But you did do a lot on the Edgar Rice Burroughs books, in particular JOHN CARTER and KORAK.*

MURPHY: That was another dream come true for me. I was a big fan of **Burroughs**. During the Ziff-Davis war years **Burroughs** had written new material and Ziff-Davis was publishing it in AMAZING STORIES before it went into book form.

LOU: *I especially enjoyed your JOHN CARTER work, in particular the stuff that Marv Wolfman scripted.*

MURPHY: KORAK also became available at the time and I did work on that.

LOU: *That was just before DC lost the contract to do the work to Marvel. And then they kicked it around for a couple of years and then the whole thing just went up the tube.*

MURPHY: I don't know why, I guess a number of things.

LOU: *We'll leave that for the Burroughs people to figure out. Because of your work with Visual Concepts your work in comics seems to have tapered off with the exception of your occasional DC jobs or your one-pagers for people like Deluxe, your T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS pin-up, the BLACK CAT cover, and a cover for COMICS REVUE. You've filled up your time with Visual Concepts.*

MURPHY: Right, we do color separations here for the industry. The biggest part of our work is with DC, of course.

WHY THE HURRY, KRYPTONIAN--UNLESS YOU'RE WORRIED THAT RED-SUN SCREEN OF YOURS MIGHT WEAR OFF BEFORE YOU'VE SPIRITED ME OUT OF RANGE OF LEXOR'S RED SUN!
LUTHOR, YOU NEVER DID KNOW WHEN TO SHUT UP!
AND WATCHING THE MAN SHE LOVES THROUGH A TEARY-EYED VISION OF SHATTERED DREAMS...
OH, LEX... WHY DID IT ALL HAVE TO END...?
GAAA?
UNNHHH!
HA! IT APPEARS MY LOYAL LEXORIAN FRIENDS ARE NOT ABOUT TO LET YOU WHISK ME AWAY WITHOUT A FIGHT!
ON EARTH, A BEAM-BLAST OF THAT MAGNITUDE WOULD HARDLY HAVE FAZED YOU, SUPERMAN!
CONCLUSION: THAT PROTECTIVE SUN-SCREEN OF YOURS HAS ALREADY BEGUN TO FADE!
A DEVELOPMENT DEFINITELY NOT IN YOUR FAVOR!

ACTION COMICS #544, Swan and Murphy, 1983.

concept more than any other feature — partly nostalgia."

We do work all around the field, including DARK HORSE, and have done a little for Marvel.

LOU: *Speaking of color separations, I see your name popping up in the comic press for doing the inking and separations for that Christian comic, AIDAZEE.*

MURPHY: Well, **Nate Butler** contacted me a number of years ago and he had been talking about this for a long time. I said that, "If (he) wanted me to give him a hand with that on a limited basis I'd be happy to do so." That was along with **Dan Zolnerowich.** Dan goes back to Fiction House days, well before my time there. He worked for years with Will. He was one of the contractors between Will and me on P*S MAGAZINE.

LOU: *You spent something like 45 years in comics — what kind of experience has it been and what work gave you the most pleasure?*

MURPHY: I would have to say that my favorite vehicle was BUCK ROGERS. I enjoyed the concept more than any other feature. Probably that's partly nostalgia. I'm sure that objectively I worked on other features that would be, well, more noteworthy to other people. As far as what I enjoyed doing, BUCK ROGERS was my favorite. As far as what I got the most satisfaction out of, as I said before, it would have to be P*S MAGAZINE.

LOU: *A final quick question, who was your favorite editor to work with in comics?*

MURPHY: I don't think there is too much to say! The only true editor I ever had would have to be **Julie Schwartz.**

LOU: *And your favorite writer?*

MURPHY: I would say **John Broome,** not to put down Gardner, Denny, Jerry, Marv, Len, Manly and a host of others . . . but John and I always seemed to be on the same wavelength.

LOU: *What was the favorite compliment paid your work?*

MURPHY: I guess the most touching, though indirect, compliment regarding my work was when I met **Alex Kotzky** (the same evening I met Will) at a Whamo-Playboy affair. Alex came to me and said, "Let me tell you something, Murphy, my son and I discovered comic-book art and I asked him who his

From MYSTERY IN SPACE #87, November, 1963, with Hawkman along with Adam Strange.

THEN I.Q. AIMS HIS WEAPON-BEAM AT HAWKMAN AND HAWKGIRL...
ZOOMING UPWARD, CAN'T HELP MYSELF!
BEAT YOUR WINGS AS FAST AS YOU CAN! IT'S OUR ONLY HOPE OF COUNTER-ACTING THE LIFTING POWERS OF THAT ODD WEAPON! HE CARRIES!
UP—UP INTO THE ATMOSPHERE THEY ARE CARRIED UNTIL...
WE'VE COME TO A STOP! BUT WE CAN'T KEEP UP THIS WING-BEATING PACE INDEFINITELY!
KEEP AT IT, HAWK-GIRL! THE BEAM SEEMS TO BE GROWING WEAKER!
BLOWN ALONG BY HIGH-ALTITUDE WINDS, A GREAT CLOUD BUBBLE ENGULFS THEM, CUTTING OFF THEIR VISION. WHEN THEY FINALLY FLY FREE...
WE'VE LOST TRACK OF THOSE AIR-BANDITS--
MAYBE WE CAN LOCATE THEM BY TRAILING THE JET-PATHS THEY LEFT IN THE AIR!

"Alex Kotzky, I consider one of the finest artists around."

BUCK ROGERS ©1958 John F. Dille Co.

Full figure illustration of Mr. Anderson's BUCK ROGERS, circa 1949.

favorite artist was. He replied . . . **Murphy Anderson.**" I thought that was quite a compliment coming from Alex, whom I consider one of the finest syndicated artists around. He also had a great history in comic books . . . never getting a lot of credit but involved in the earliest days as a virtually undetectable ghost for **Eisner, Fine, Caniff, Crandall, Drake,** etc. before starting his own strip, APARTMENT 3-G. Even a second-hand compliment from such a talented contemporary has to rank as my favorite.

LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

MARVELOUS — OR OMINOUS? AN OPEN LETTER TO THE COMICS INDUSTRY

An open letter to all comic-book companies, dealers, distributors, comic-store owners, and comic-book buyers (for whatever reason):

The recent stock offering of Marvel Comics has been read and analyzed with a fine-tooth comb over the past few months. I've read analyses in CBG, by **Milt Griepp** of Capital City, **Will Elsner,** and have had a customer of mine who is a broker look it over. In particular, this open letter is directed to issues raised in the offering, one obvious, the other not quite so obvious. The explicit message that Marvel is conveying is that they plan an aggressive expansion over the coming years. This is what they are really selling in the stock offering. The second, more implicit, message is what this letter will be concerned with, particularly in relation to comic specialty shops

The first major step which Marvel is proposing is the "Fan Club." Reading the offering clearly indicates that this is a cover story to increase their subscriber base, which is very low right now. Many of us in the industry have noted (unfortunately with satisfaction) that specialty shops account for the largest share of circulation for Marvel (large being close to 80%). We have taken satisfaction in the apparent fact that at this point, the specialty stores keep Marvel in business. Thinking beyond the immediate, this is an ominous concept. *No* business wants to be dependent on one customer, particularly a customer over whom they have no control. This is the situation which Marvel clearly outlines. They also indicate the start of what they will do, aggressively, about this. We have to work on one basic assumption, that any successful business (and Marvel is a successful business) will want control over their product, once a market has been established. IBM, AT&T, GE are all examples of this.

The specialty stores, over the past 15 or so years, have established a stable and growing market for the product. The key area here is a concept which I believe has outlived its usefulness, that of non-returnable books (direct), which are supplied at a deeper discount than newsstand issues. Newsstand issues are returnable, and therefore the newsstand can afford to take smaller discounts since nothing is lost but some display space. The specialty stores have a deeper discount, since their orders are non-returnable (with very minor exceptions), and they have either ordered a hit, or are stuck with unsellable inventory. I'm spelling all of this out, since it's pertinent to the foundation of understanding what I strongly believe will happen over the next 3-10 years. A competent dealer will order what he/she believes is a safe number, to maximize profit, and not end up with frozen, unsellable inventory. These figures are turned over to a distributor (Comics Unlimited, Capital City, etc.), who totals these figures, adds a bit for re-orders, say 10%-15%, arriving at the total sent to Marvel for print runs. This means the total print run of any comic is basically determined by anywhere from 2,500 to 4,000 dealers throughout the country. Marvel at this point clearly has a solid idea of the number of legitimate specialty stores in the country, since in order for a store to receive the "free" platinum McSpidey, every dealer had to register with Marvel. If they didn't register, they didn't get one.

If I were Marvel, I wouldn't want the situation outlined above and according to the stock offering, neither does Marvel. Attempting to increase subscriber base is a first step toward making inroads into the control which the specialty shops have. The question of people who don't have access to specialty shops is readily handled by the mail-order services (and there are many of these, e.g., Mile High, etc.); they ship promptly, pack carefully, offer discounts, and offer a much more complete line, than just Marvels. If Marvel's concern is to increase subscriber base for those who have neither comic shops nor mail-order services available, then subscription offers should not appear in the direct-market editions, but rather only in newsstand editions. Otherwise, it might be construed that this is unfair competition, since Marvel's offer can contain much deeper discounts than any shop can offer on a regular basis. Every subscriber takes away one potential sale from a specialty 'shop (please note that I'm located in New York City, and I'd suspect that since there are so many shops, and newsstands, subscribers do not *at all* affect the New York market; I'm thinking in broader terms).

So, the first phase is to broaden subscribers, thus attempting to diminish the impact and control of specialty shops. Then, expansion into other markets, 7-11, gift shops, record stores, video stores would be an ideally fertile ground, and it seems there is clear correlation between video and comics, making video stores an excellent market to exploit. All of this directly responds to the issue that newsstand sales are static or dropping, and Marvel is taking control by finding alternate markets. This will certainly help the expansion of the comics sale base in general, but, again, presents an area of diminished consumer dollars for the specialty shops.

However, the thrust of this open letter goes much deeper. Keeping in mind that the perceived object is to return power to the major companies (power=control and money), and to divert the perceived and growing power (i.e., threat), the specialty shops have, the only obvious eventual solution is what I would term "company stores." Envision a Marvel Shop, wherein *everything* is in stock; Marvel comics not only current, but perhaps for the past 3-6 months, at cover price (or less), every poster, hardcover, trade paperback, every model, bisque, PVC figure, every tee-shirt. It boggles the mind (and the pocket-book), *and it is conceivable,* and to me extremely logical. Almost every comic store in the United States depends upon its current issues to cover monthly expenses. Profit is usually derived from "hot" books, and back-issue sales. Take away current-issue sales from these stores, and you take away the stores. Take away the stores and provide an alternative, and you gain control. Could they replicate the number of stores? Let us say the current new-issue sales run $300,000,000. This may be off, but it's a decent hypothetical figure. I've heard that approximately 30% of every dollar spent in a specialty shop is point-of-purchase; that is, not planned. That would run to about $90,000,000. Now, say profit here is only 5%; that's close to $5,000,000. The potential profit margin here would clearly legitimize a capital-

ization to cover set-up, rent and salaries.

All of this, good or bad? As in all things in the real world, there is no simple answer. Company stores on several levels would be good for the consumer. Possibly cheaper prices, perhaps deeper discounts for store subscribers; Marvel could offer a 50% discount to subscribers in stores, and still make money. They could control press runs, and feature what *they* want. If, for example, BARBIE sells 50,000 today (hypothetical) and they want to promote the merchandising (which is where the real money is), i.e., toys, posters, video, etc., they could print 2,000,000 BARBIE comics, feature them in window displays in all of their stores; and discount the comics deeply. It's a wonderful merchandising opportunity, and any large, well-run company would grab it. Downside here? Probably increased cover prices, way beyond what we think of as price increases now. In the Marvel report, they speak of 25¢ per year; I think in terms of $1 per year, eventually most books being perfect-bound, mini- or full trade paperbacks.

From the dealer-specialty shop perspective, as far as "new issues," there is little positive. One sensible feature of this future-gazing would be not to distribute to dealer-owned shops unless they enter into franchise negotiations with a major company. What this might entail is that they will be told by the company what they can sell, with no choice (control back to the company). The company would tell the store what to feature, possibly with no returns. The store would not be able to get new issues, because the distribution chain would have been interrupted. The distributors would have to be franchised also, or the companies take complete control of their own distribution, setting up their own systems; some major alteration of the current system would need to be envisioned. DC, as is their usual pattern, a year or two after Marvel, would think of this same idea, and pursue it, unless they join forces at the start (or has it already started?).

Most specialty shops are in existence because the owners choose to be independent, and have control. Stores would fall by the wayside, or become a part of the system. The few remaining specialty shops would be strictly for collectors, dealing with back issues, not current material. They would vie with each other to purchase collections, pushing up the price of back issues — bad for the collector. Carrying this even further, the "company store" might decide to go into the back-issue business, if there was enough profit. Would all specialty shops become satellites of the big companies, or go out of business? How would supplies of recent back issues be delivered to the remaining shops? The "company store" would set a cut-off date for back issues, and the remaining stock either through privileged negotiations or perhaps auction, would be turned over to the few remaining shops. Again this could mean higher back-issue prices, still with deeper discounts for current material, keeping in mind the current material is what fuels the merchandising aspects of this plan.

Is all of this projected scenario good or bad? Both and neither, there are advantages and disadvantages. If you favor a scenario like this, then I'd say join fan clubs, subscribe to all of your favorites, gradually withdraw support from your local shops or privately-owned mail services. If not, then boycott fan clubs and subscriptions, purchase more independents. Is this scenario fairy-taleish, or paranoia? Perhaps, but all I know is that it would be extremely good business planning for the big companies, giving them total control over their product, and increasing their profit margins, while expanding the base of sales for massive merchandising. This seems to meet the criteria of the stock offering and projected plan for Marvel. Perhaps the day of direct distribution to individually-owned comic shops is coming to an end. Change is always frightening; that doesn't mean it's bad.

I'm forwarding copies of this letter to Marvel, DC, **Jon Warren, Bob Overstreet,** CVM, CBG, Capital City, Comics Unlimited, and other interested parties. I hope it shall see print, and be responded to, only to open this up, and allow for communication on a level which may be helpful to *all* of us. As I write this, I keep thinking of the final line from the first movie version of THE THING — "watch the skies". . .

Roger L. Smyth, Ph.D.
Owner, Funny Business
656 Amsterdam Avenue
New York, NY 10025

DOWN AT GROTH'S LEVEL?

Dear Dave,

In addition to Cat's comments [in #100], I want to say to you directly that I'm disappointed in you for running such an inane poll [as the Power 100]. It's something down at Groth's level. Inherent in the query is that absolute power equals influence (it doesn't); that those with POWER aren't well liked and step on other people's toes (not necessarily true); and that people in this varied medium/business can actually be ranked (there are too many people/companies/kinds of influences to be able to rank people). It's a very flawed survey, one that would be rejected by any high-school sociology teacher. The only thing it can accomplish is to provide you with an inaccurate, COMICS JOURNAL-esque piece of bad journalism.

I hope that you reconsider your decision to run this piece.

Dean Mullaney
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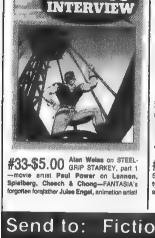

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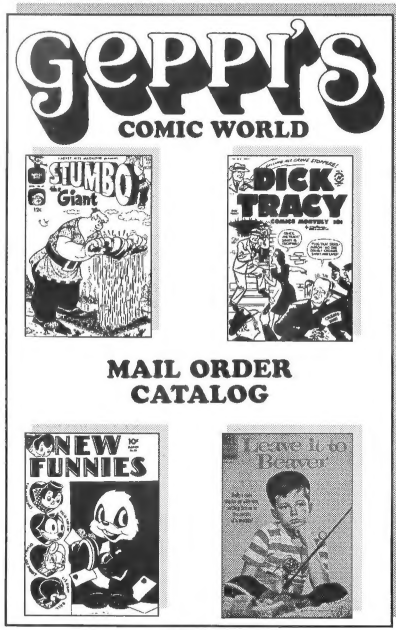

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